Monuments and Territory

War Memorials in Russian-Occupied Ukraine

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Introduction

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russian dictator Vladimir Putin expected a three-day campaign to topple the Ukrainian government and establish military control over the neighboring country. Instead, the attack ushered in a brutal and costly war on multiple fronts that is still ongoing two years after the invasion. The scale of destruction has far surpassed that of the war Russia had already been waging against Ukraine in that country's south-eastern Donets'k and Luhans'k regions since 2014. So has the loss of life. Ukrainian soldiers have died defending their country on the battlefield; civilians have been murdered by indiscriminate and deliberate Russian missile attacks on residential areas and in massacres and forced disappearances on occupied territory. The casualties suffered by Russia's own military have significantly exceeded those of any other campaign Russian soldiers have been involved in since the Second World War.[1]

Since the very first weeks of the war, Russian soldiers, politicians, and proxy administrators have expended considerable effort interacting with monuments on newly occupied territory. They have paid particular attention to war memorials, whether dating from Soviet times or built in independent Ukraine: memorials commemorating the dead of the Second World War first and foremost, but also those dedicated to a range of other military conflicts throughout the ages. They have destroyed, damaged, or removed some of these monuments; renovated or modified others; and soon started installing memorials of their own, all the way from small plaques to large statues. Even as the war was raging, they also used memo-

1 For an account of the war and its causes, see Serhii Plokhy, *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2023).

rials as venues and backdrops for numerous ceremonies commemorating past wars. War memorials and associated practices have been among the main motifs of Russian war propaganda, especially videos, photos, and news reports produced for domestic audiences. Ukrainians, for their part, have used war memorials as symbols of defiance and resistance.

Why have the Russian invaders cared enough about war memorials to divert scarce resources to destroying, maintaining, or building them amid a massive war? Why have they removed some memorials and spared others? What is the point of commemorating past victories and defeats while bombing Ukrainian cities, and how did commemorative ceremonies in the occupied territories change over the first year of the war? What has been the broader impact of monument-related practices beyond the local settings in which they have occurred? And what does the Ukrainian case teach us more generally about how memorials to past wars can be used to justify new conquests? These are some of the questions this book explores, based on a detailed study of the treatment of war memorials in Russian-occupied Ukraine during the first year after the large-scale invasion.

War memorials and territorial claims

In times of controversies over statues of past oppressors, debates about monuments often center on representations of the past and the ways in which they continue to haunt the descendants of the oppressed.[2] Yet monuments also play a significant role in situations of actual physical violence. In particular, every new war affects memorials to past wars: suddenly appearing as precursors to the ongoing conflict, they are treated as sources of patriotic inspiration or reminders of the cost of war and are often expanded to inscribe today's fallen into a longer history of military prowess and sacrifice.

In addition, physical reminders of a shared past or a previous military, administrative, or religious presence can offer invaders a pretext

2 For an overview of recent debates, see Ann Rigney, "Decommissioning Monuments, Mobilizing Materialities," in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism*, ed. Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2023), 21–27; Sarah Gensburger and Jenny Wüstenberg, eds., *De-Commemoration: Removing Statues and Renaming Places* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2023). See also analyses of individual conflicts over statues worldwide in EuroClio's *Contested Histories* project at https://euroclio.eu/projects/contested-histories.

for conquest and allow oppressors to justify their continued rule. This often takes the form of a claim that such monuments are not being properly maintained and treated with the appropriate respect. The protection of Christian churches and monasteries was among the rationales for nineteenth-century Russian, French, and British "humanitarian" military intervention in the Ottoman lands.[3] During both the First World War and the Mandate period, the presence of vestiges of Crusader castles in the Levant provided the British and French with a justification for colonial rule.[4] In the twentieth century, monuments to the Battle of Kosovo of 1389 were used to sustain Serb claims to modern-day Kosovo.[5] This type of justification for conquest came to the fore in the latter half of the nineteenth century, responding to the rise of a modern public opinion with an interest in monuments that needed to be swayed in favor of military intervention.

In all of these cases, there is a dynamic of erasure and invented tradition at work. This is also in ample evidence in the Russian occupation of Ukraine. In laying claim to supposed vestiges of an older past, conquerors implicitly or explicitly assert that the most recent period in the history of a territory and set of monuments is but a blunder, one that needs to be expunged from the historical record so that an older past and the newly glorious present can be joined together like two pieces of a puzzle that were meant to be connected. Yet invariably, the monuments they find and the practices associated with them bear the mark of the previous period: the British, French, and Russians found Christian castles and monasteries in the state in which Ottoman laws on religion and antiquities shaped them, not in some primordial pre-Islamic condition. In 2022, the Russians did not simply restore Soviet war memorials to an original pre-1991 or pre-2014 state as they often claimed; rather, as we show in this book, they adopted many of the practices of memorialization and

3 Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914: The Emergence of a European Concept and International Practice*, Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 98, 100, 287.

4 Dotan Halevy, "Ottoman Ruins Captured: Antiquities, Preservation, and Waqf in Mandatory Palestine," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (2018): 91–114.

5 On the design history of some of these monuments, see Bratislav Pantelić, "Designing Identities: Reshaping the Balkans in the First Two Centuries: The Case of Serbia," *Journal of Design History* 20, no. 2 (2007): 131–44.

commemoration developed in independent Ukraine and started claiming them as their own.

In supporting territorial claims, war memorials and man-made monuments in general are part of a broader spectrum, which also includes what has been called "imperial relandscaping" and, more specifically, efforts to alter the natural landscape to make it conform to ethnonational stereotypes: "Jewish" pine trees in Israel/Palestine, "Russian" birches, or "Ukrainian" guelder roses in Ukraine.[6]

Such pretensions are often exclusionary, treating monuments as evidence that a territory primordially belongs to a certain group, whereas others living there have less of a claim on the land. Memorials erected by those with less of a claim on the territory are then declared illegitimate, inauthentic, and unworthy.[7] France and Germany removed some of each other's war memorials and other monuments in Alsace-Lorraine each time the region changed hands between them in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;[8] some post-Habsburg states destroyed symbols of Austro-Hungarian military glory as they became independent in 1918; and the Soviet Union eliminated Estonian, Polish, or Romanian war memorials in territories it annexed in 1939 and 1944.[9]

This kind of sanitization can be swift and thorough, but often it is gradual and incomplete. In some of the cases just mentioned, individual examples of the offending memorials survive to this day. Yet while sometimes attention is directed to monuments only after the end of military conflict,

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6 On "imperial relandscaping," see Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). On ethnonational tree-planting, see Irus Braverman, *Planted Flags: Trees, Land, and Law in Israel/Palestine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On the reverse phenomenon of using tree-planting to make a landscape look more cosmopolitan, see Tsypylma Darieva, "Rethinking Homecoming: Diasporic Cosmopolitanism in Post-Soviet Armenia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34, no. 3 (2011): 490–508.

7 Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 30.

8 Malgorzata Praczyk, *Reading Monuments: A Comparative Study of Monuments in Poznań and Strasbourg from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2020).

9 On the de-Polonization of L'viv, see Tarik Cyril Amar, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv: A Borderland City between Stalinists, Nazis, and Nationalists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). On the Estonian case, see, for example, Ants Hein, "Denkmäler der sowjetischen Ära in Estland," in *Bildersturm in Osteuropa: die Denkmäler der kommunistischen Ära im Umbruch: eine Tagung des Deutschen Nationalkomitees von ICOMOS, des Instituts für Auslandsbeziehungen und der Senatsverwaltung Berlin in der Botschaft der Russischen Förderation in Berlin, 18.–20. Februar 1993*, ed. Florian Fiedler and Michael Petzet, ICOMOS—Hefte des deutschen Nationalkomitees, XIII (Munich: Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, 1994), 69; Rahvusarhiiv (Estonian State Archive), ERAF.1.3.501, ERAF.5.5.65.

at other times it is an integral part of conquest and occupation practices, diverting resources from actual combat.

When occupying parts of the Soviet Union, the Nazis and their allies destroyed a number of Soviet monuments: statues of Bolshevik leaders first and foremost, but also some war memorials. (In response, when the Red Army recaptured the occupied territories, it razed most of the military burial sites that the Germans, Italians, or Romanians had created for their soldiers.[10]) German plans went further: the architect Wilhelm Kreis designed gigantic "fortresses of the dead" that were to be built in conquered territories to celebrate German victory. The largest of them, a 130-meter-tall Etruscan-style structure, was to be erected on the banks of the Dnipro in Ukraine.[11] In addition, Nazi projects for ethnic cleansing and German resettlement in Eastern Europe were fueled by historical fantasies such as the idea that the Goths, one of the many groups that had historically inhabited Crimea, had been Germans and had ruled over the peninsula. Inspired by nineteenth-century German nationalism, this prompted Nazi leaders Adolf Hitler and Alfred Rosenberg during the German occupation of Crimea to invest resources into searching for traces of a Gothic presence that might serve as a pretext for creating a Gothic District (*Gotengau*) in the area.[12]

In all of the cases cited so far, war memorials were removed, altered, or installed as evidence that one ethnic or political group had no business commemorating its military victories and defeats in a given territory, whereas another did: starting in 1944, the Soviet Union removed monuments to the Estonian Liberation War against the Bolsheviks in 1919 just

10 See, for example, V.Iu. Pankov, "Germano-ital'ianskie zakhoroneniia na territorii pravoberezhnoi chasti Gomelia v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny," in *Aktual'nye problemy Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny na territorii sovremennoi Gomel'skoi oblasti (k 75-letiiu nachala Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny): materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii*, ed. N.N. Mezga, K.S. Mishchenko, and S.V. Riazanov (Gomel': BelGUT, 2016), 208–16.

11 Gunnar Brands, "From World War I Cemeteries to the Nazi 'Fortresses of the Dead': Architecture, Heroic Landscape and the Quest for National Identity in Germany," in *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design*, ed. Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001), 215–56; Nina Janz, "Totenhügel und Waldfriedhöfe—die Gräber und Friedhöfe für gefallene Wehrmachtssoldaten während des Zweiten Weltkriegs zwischen individueller Gräberfürsorge und nationalsozialistischem Totenkult," in "War Graves, War Cemeteries, and Memorial Shrines as a Building Task (1914 to 1989)/Die Bauaufgabe Soldatenfriedhof, 1914–1989," ed. Christian Fuhrmeister and Kai Kappel, special issue, *RIHA Journal*, June 2017, no pagination.

12 Norbert Kunz, *Die Krim unter deutscher Herrschaft (1941–1944): Germanisierungsutopie und Besatzungsrealität* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 41–73.

as it was erecting memorials to the liberation of Estonia from Nazi rule. What makes the Russian-Ukrainian case—and more largely Russia's geo-commemorative grievances against other Soviet successor states—special is that the past is acknowledged as shared, but the group currently in control is accused of having betrayed that common legacy by insufficiently honoring its memorials.

It is not unusual for countries that used to be part of a single political entity to acknowledge a shared legacy that continues to shape a bond between them. The cult of Simón Bolívar in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela comes to mind, or the veneration of Rabindranath Tagore in India and East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh. In these and other cases, interpretations of the meaning of the founding figure evolve over time and differ across national borders. This can lead to disputes over who remembers the legacy correctly. Usually, however, such disputes concern individual figures. In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, by contrast, what is at stake is the treatment of a large number of dead bodies and of innumerable grave markers spread over a vast territory. In addition, the cult of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 has played a crucial if hotly contested role in both Ukraine and Russia over the past decades, unlike other historical cases: thus, the dead of the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I were being buried at a time when the empire was already disintegrating into national entities, and what cults emerged after 1918 typically focused on the fallen of individual nationalities rather than the entire imperial army.[13]

Accusations of historical revisionism and blasphemy have been central to Russia's criticism of the way in which the Great Patriotic War—or the Second World War—is commemorated in other post-Soviet states such as Ukraine. Russia's ideology was succinctly expressed by a Russian soldier filmed in Ukraine for a Victory Day propaganda video: "We are not occupying anyone, we are not hurting anyone here. We have a common past." The characteristic presentation of the soldier, who was masked and pseudonymous, belied that statement and graphically demonstrated the contradictions between Russian discourse and the reality on the ground.[14]

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13 *Sztuka w mundurze: Krakowski Oddział Grobów Wojennych 1915–1918 / Art in Uniform: The War Graves Department in Kraków 1915–1918*, ed. Beata K. Nykiel, Agniezska Partridge, and Kamil Ruszała (Kraków: Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury / International Cultural Centre, 2022).

14 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1826, May 8, 2022.

Russian justifications for the war against Ukraine since 2014 and especially after the full-scale invasion of 2022 have amply referenced monuments. In doing so, they have built upon a long-standing tradition. Indeed, war memorials and pictures of such memorials had already been used in Soviet times in propaganda and education, particularly school history textbooks, for the specific purpose of visualizing a republic's or region's belonging to the family of Soviet nations by showcasing its contribution to the joint war effort.[15] In the ongoing war, Russian propaganda has frequently claimed that the Ukrainian government and nationalist forces are destroying monuments to any Russian presence in Ukraine, to the shared Soviet past, and especially to the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45, or leaving them to decay and preventing local residents from maintaining them.[16] During the 2022 invasion and occupation, monuments, and particularly war memorials, were central to propagandistic illustrations of the benefits of Russian rule.

Especially during the first four months of the occupation, Soviet war memorials were among the main markers of "liberation" in (pro-)Russian online and offline media. These media established visual connections between, on the one hand, the well-known symbolic canon of liberation from Nazi rule and victory over Germany in the Second World War and, on the other, what Russia presented as liberation from a new Nazi regime. The central rituals involving Great Patriotic War memorials included (re-)kindling eternal flames and hoisting the Victory Banner associated with the Soviet conquest of Berlin in 1945—rather than, or alongside, the Russian flag.[17]

Conversely, the Russian occupiers made a show of removing or destroying recent Ukrainian monuments to those involved in fighting against

15 Mischa Gabowitsch, "Visuals in History Textbooks: War Memorials in Soviet and Post-Soviet School Education, 1945–2021," *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 15, no. 1 (2023): 99–128.

16 In this book, we use the Soviet and Russian term "Great Patriotic War" when referring to narratives or memorials that employ the term and reference the period from 1941 (rather than 1939) to 1945. Regarding popular attitudes in Ukraine toward the designations "Great Patriotic War" and "Second World War," see André Liebich, Oksana Myshlovska, and Viktoriia Sereda, "The Ukrainian Past and Present: Legacies, Memory and Attitudes," in *Regionalism without Regions: Reconceptualizing Ukraine's Heterogeneity*, ed. Ulrich Schmid and Oksana Myshlovska (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2019), 111–13.

17 Mykola Homanyuk, "Reich, Union, Rossija: Die Symbolpolitik der Besatzer in der Ukraine," *Osteuropa*, no. 12 (2022): 13–45.

Russia in different historical eras. In doing so, they echoed countless historical cases in which conquerors destroyed monuments whose depictions of nationhood and resistance could challenge their claim to newly occupied territory. Like other conquerors before them, they also sometimes left monuments intact when they could fit them into their own politics of history, or simply out of oversight or lack of resources. The Ukrainian side likewise used monuments and images of monuments, including World War II memorials, as symbols of Ukraine's unbroken fighting spirit, of continuity between the struggle against fascist invaders then and now, and of wanton destruction by the Russian military.

Drawing on visual studies, memory and heritage studies, and ethnographic approaches to commemoration, this book explores the treatment of war memorials in the Ukrainian territories newly occupied by the Russian military since February 24, 2022. Based on sources collected during the conflict itself while one of the co-authors was living in Russian-occupied Kherson and later in a Kharkiv bomb shelter, our study is a fine-grained history of one important aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

At the same time, this work attends to wider theoretical and comparative concerns, which are addressed in greater detail in the first chapter. Contributing to memory studies, we use the ongoing war as a case study of what happens when grand narratives of the politics of history meet a complex local memorial landscape and of how competing claims to a shared heritage play out in situations of armed conflict. Regarding visual studies, we seek to go beyond the traditional approach to the study of monuments, which looks at what they represent and how, to study how monuments themselves are represented in different media. We are also interested in how conflicts, including military conflicts, about rival interpretations of history are also clashes of different temporalities, drawing lines of continuity between different historical events and eras in different ways.[18] Addressing heritage studies, we seek to expand the scholarly conversation about monuments in times of war beyond the time-honored topic of preserving and protecting built heritage,[19] which is already being stud-

18 Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Mischa Gabowitsch, "Regimes of Temporality," in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism*, ed. Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2023), 48–51.

19 See, for example, Steven Maddox, *Saving Stalin's Imperial City: Historic Preservation in Leningrad, 1930–1950* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015).

ied with regard to the Russian invasion of Ukraine,[20] to how war drives the rediscovery, reinterpretation, and modification of monuments—just as it did during the Second World War, when members of the Red Army and Soviet political agencies were amazed to discover forgotten imperial-era monuments to Russia's wars against Sweden, France, or the Ottoman Empire, and drew inspiration from them for the memorialization of the war against Hitler's Germany.[21] Finally, our book also speaks to the sociological literature about situated cognition and the importance of the "material equipment" of a situation for the justification of action.[22]

Structure, scope, sources, and methods

Our sources were collected through the systematic monitoring of every *raion* (district) of Ukraine newly occupied in part or in full by Russian forces, for whatever length of time, since February 24, 2022, covering parts of the Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv, Mykolaïv, Sumy, and Zaporizhzhia *oblasts* (regions), as well as those parts of the Donets'k and Luhans'k regions that had not been part of the self-proclaimed People's Republics and were brought under Russian control after the 2022 invasion.

For every such territory we went through both pro-occupation and pro-Ukrainian Telegram channels[23] as well as local and regional news websites, including those published in the self-proclaimed Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics (DNR and LNR), national media from both Ukraine and Russia, and international media. We collected photos, videos,

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20 See, for example, Marc R. H. Kosciejew, "Endangered Cultural Heritage in the Russia–Ukraine War: Comparing and Critiquing Interventions by International Cultural Heritage Organizations," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 29, no. 11 (2023): 1158–77.

21 Mischa Gabowitsch, "Monuments in Times of War: Stalin's National Turn and the Rediscovery of Military Memorials" (Stalinism and War conference, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, May 24–26, 2016).

22 Bernard Conein, Nicolas Dodier, and Laurent Thévenot, eds., *Les objets dans l'action: de la maison au laboratoire* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études de sciences sociales, 1993); Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, trans. Catherine Porter (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006); Laurent Thévenot, *L'action au pluriel* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2006); Bernard Conein, "L'action avec les objets: Un autre visage de l'action située?," in *Cognition et information en société*, ed. Laurent Thévenot (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2020), 25–45.

23 For an overview of Russian-managed Telegram channels for the occupied territories, see Andrii Zakharov, Anastasiia Lotar'ova, and Olesia Herasymenko, "'Nezabarom perelashtuietes'.' Iak Rosiia zakripliuet'sia na okupovanykh ukraïnskykh terytoriiakh," *BBC News Ukraïna*, April 29, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-61277532.

and texts documenting any modifications to *intentional monuments*[24] *commemorating any armed conflict and anyone participating in or affected by such a conflict* (our working definition of a "war memorial"), as well as ceremonies and other events involving such memorials. Most of these sources were collected very soon after they appeared online; a significant number of them disappeared from the original sites of publication soon thereafter but have been preserved in our archive.

We also collected a number of printed sources, primarily newspapers printed by the occupation administrations. These were supplemented with field observations and photographs made in and around occupied Kherson as well as in most free Ukrainian regions (20 out of a total of 27[25]), sources about the history of the monuments in question and of their uses in commemorative ceremonies, as well as informal online and offline interviews with local residents and, finally, written reports by undergraduate students living in several occupied towns and villages in the Kherson region.[26] This interplay between digital and on-site ethnography proved particularly fruitful for our work. While our sources for Kherson and its region are particularly fine-grained due to Mykola Homanyuk's presence, intimate familiarity, and dense network of contacts in the region, the sources collected there helped orient our search for online sources regarding other regions. For historical background and comparison, we also occasionally refer to archival sources that Mischa Gabowitsch collected in archives in Ukraine and other former Soviet republics in the course of his research on the history of Soviet war memorials. In addition, we also draw on the results of several focus groups and a quantitative survey of Kharkiv residents that Mykola Homanyuk conducted in October–November 2022.[27]

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24 Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origin [1903]," trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions*, no. 25 (1982): 21–51.

25 Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Dnipropetrovs'k, Donets'k, Ivano-Frankivs'k, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv and the Kyiv region, Kirovohrad, Luhans'k, Mykolaïv, Odesa, Poltava, Rivne, Sumy, Ternopil, Volyn', Zaporizhzhia, and Zhytomyr.

26 The bulk of the sources were collected by Mykola Homanyuk, with additional data collection, especially at the writing stage, by Mischa Gabowitsch. With few exceptions, references to our informants are anonymized to minimize risks resulting from sharing information with us. Many of them remain on territories occupied by Russia and are therefore in constant danger. Others are on active duty in the Ukrainian army and, if taken prisoner, could be singled out for special reprisals.

27 The focus groups were conducted on October 30, and the survey (N: 914) between November 10 and 22. Both were designed and conducted by Mykola Homanyuk and Ihor Danylenko with some input at the design stage from Mischa Gabowitsch. For an overview, see

Chronologically, we focus on the first year of the full-scale invasion and the ensuing occupation, from February 24, 2022, to February 24, 2023. This allows us to cover an entire annual cycle of commemorative events associated with war memorials, ending with those in honor of Russia's "Defender of the Fatherland" day on February 23 and of course events associated with the one-year anniversary of the invasion itself. We also draw on occasional examples from territories that were already under the control of the self-proclaimed Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics before the 2022 campaign, from Crimea, from regions that have remained under Ukrainian administration, and from Russia.[28] However, we did not systematically collect sources from those areas, where the dynamics have been different. Nor did we include sources about monuments not directly related to wars, such as Lenin statues, although Mykola Homanyuk has systematically addressed these elsewhere, showing that they have been far less significant in legitimating the invasion than war memorials.[29] Overall, our book focuses squarely on areas that came under Russian control in 2022 and the role war memorials have played in the occupation.

We itemized our collected sources using standardized index cards, recording data about the location, appearance, and history of the monuments, post-occupation changes to them, as well as any other relevant observations. Following the initial monitoring stage, we went through all the collected sources and inductively noted patterns and themes, discussing our impressions and comparing them with the results of research both of us had previously done on war memorials in Ukraine and elsewhere. The process of writing and discussing the text generated additional questions and made us go back to the sources already collected and to also look for new ones. However, it was not our objective to document every single case of interaction with war memorials or to provide a quantitative analysis. Rather, we were interested in discovering different types of interac-

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Mykola Homanyuk and Ihor Danylenko, "Symvolichnyi prostir mista: viziia kharkivian," *Kharkivska sotsiolohichna merezha* (blog), December 2022, http://soc.kh.ua/doslidzhennya/strong-symvolichnyj-prostir-mista-viziya-harkiv-yan-strong; Oleksiy Gnatiuk and Mykola Homanyuk, "From Geopolitical Fault-Line to Frontline City: Changing Attitudes to Memory Politics in Kharkiv under the Russo-Ukrainian War," *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 72, no. 3 (2023): 239–56.

28 Johanna Fabel provided valuable research assistance regarding DNR/LNR and Russian sources.

29 Julie Deschepper and Mykola Homanyuk, "The Returns of Lenin: (Ab)Uses of Monumental Heritage in Russian-Occupied Ukraine," Unpublished Manuscript, n.d.

tion. Thus, in this book, we present and analyze the entire range of roles that war memorials played in the 2022 occupation.

Chapter 1 discusses some of the theoretical presuppositions of our work. In particular, we discuss the move beyond interest in the creation and destruction of monuments to the study of what happens in between: the complex biographies and shifting meanings of monuments and the ways in which they are often modified in their lifetimes. We also argue for moving beyond the study of individual monuments as such to looking at memorial landscapes or *monumentscapes*. This in turn helps us better understand the link between monuments and territory—something that has proven so crucial in the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Chapter 2 lays out the historical background and provides a brief overview of independent Ukraine's hybrid memorial landscape. Here we dwell particularly on recent changes to war memorials in rural Ukraine, which constitute the most widespread type of memorial in the country and, consequently, the one the Russian invaders interacted with most often.

In the main body of the book, our prime focus is on the actions of the occupiers and their collaborators. Thus, chapter 3 discusses how the invaders destroyed or modified some war memorials, and their reasons for sparing others. We also document their use of monument maintenance or destruction as a punishment or reeducation measure, as well as monument theft. In chapter 4, we explore how they strove, pretended, or planned to rebuild or renovate existing monuments and to erect new ones as symbols of Russian rule not only in the newly conquered territories but also in Russia and the parts of Ukraine already under Russian control.

Chapter 5 analyzes how both sides and their supporters used images of war memorials in their online and offline propaganda. Our main focus here is on how different formats and camera angles propel or illustrate different narratives about the war and how they establish different—hierarchical or equal—relationships between monuments and people.

In chapter 6, we look at how Ukrainians used war memorials to respond to the invasion: by spreading anti-occupation messages, by toppling monuments now seen—rightly or wrongly—as markers of Russian imperial rule, and by rebuilding and (re-)Ukrainianizing the memorial landscape of areas liberated from under Russian control. In this part of the book, we also refer to some of the complex ongoing discussions about Ukraine's built heritage.

Finally, it is impossible to separate the Russian treatment of war memorials in Ukraine from the commemorative ceremonies and other rituals that are centered on these memorials. Monuments were typically destroyed, altered, restored, or built specifically in preparation for dates such as Victory Day (May 9), generating most of the visual sources we collected. Thus, our discussion throughout this book touches not only on the monuments themselves but also on the associated practices and symbols. In addition, chapter 7 focuses squarely on these symbols and practices as well as the commemorative calendar the Russian occupiers instituted. Readers entirely unfamiliar with the Soviet and post-Soviet culture of war commemoration and the associated memory wars and symbols might want to consult this chapter first before returning to the main body of the book.

Chapter 1
Theorizing the Monumentscape

The number of war memorials in Ukraine is staggering. By the mid-1980s, one official account already mentioned a figure of over 40,000 monuments related to the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45.[1] That is an average of ten thousand for every year the war had lasted, according to the official Soviet chronology, or for every decade that had passed since the war ended. Since then, as we will see in detail in the next chapter, many more have been added, honoring not just the Second World War but also other conflicts, most importantly the war in the Donbas region since 2014, known in Ukraine as the Anti-Terrorist Operation or ATO.[2]

How can existing theories of monuments help us make sense of a situation where war memorials are so ubiquitous? And how can the Ukrainian case, and in particular the treatment of war memorials by the Russian invaders, help us think more generally about monuments?

After all, Ukraine is not unique. Vast numbers of war memorials can also be found in other post-Soviet countries—especially those, like Belarus or Moldova, that were entirely occupied during the Second World War and saw some of the heaviest fighting. And if we use a broad definition of what constitutes a war memorial, even a country like the United

1 Jonathan Brunstedt, *The Soviet Myth of World War II: Patriotic Memory and the Russian Question in the USSR* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 9. In 1992, the historian Dmytro Chobit mentioned the number of 42,900 Great Patriotic War memorials in Ukraine. See Dmytro Chobit, "Nadzdohaniaiuchy viky," *Holos Ukraïny*, October 2, 1992, cited in Liebich, Myshlovska, and Sereda, "The Ukrainian Past and Present," 82.

2 The term "anti-terrorist operation" or ATO technically refers to the period between April 14, 2014, and April 30, 2018, after which the actions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the Russian-occupied parts of the Donets'k and Luhan'sk regions were renamed the Joint Forces Operation (*Operatsiia ob'iednanykh syl* or OOS). However, the latter term was not taken up in public discourse, and we have not encountered any instances of it being used on memorials.

Kingdom, which has not seen foreign occupation in centuries, has over 100,000 of them.[3]

However, the literature on monuments in general, and on war memorials in particular, tends to be structured around individual case studies. Authors usually start with large memorials whose significance transcends their location—those installed in large cities or at especially well-known sites of battle or extermination. Case studies of a handful of second-tier sites sometimes complement the picture.[4] It is often assumed that by studying the largest memorials, we can learn something that is true of memorials in general, at least those of a certain type.

Yet in Ukraine, as elsewhere, the vast majority of war memorials are located in small towns or rural areas. This is all the more true of the areas of the country occupied by Russia in 2022, which included few large cities. Within the occupied territories, the invaders interacted with war memorials in almost every district they occupied, not just with a few select monuments in particularly symbolic locations. In fact, their rationale for the invasion referenced Soviet war memorials in general, promising to restore respect for such memorials across Ukraine. As we shall argue, the very ubiquity of war memorials is integral to their role in establishing a link between territory and memory, reflecting a more general "territorialization of memory."[5] In addition, as this book will demonstrate, there has been considerable variation in Russian monument policies: their treatment of war memorials has varied between locations and has evolved over time, especially over the first year of the invasion, which is the main focus of our study. Thus, in order to provide a meaningful account of the role of war memorials in the Russian war on Ukraine, it is not enough to focus on a few select memorials or on the most conspicuous events, such as monument toppling.

In light of this, our approach to war memorials draws upon two conceptual strands that weave through much of the international literature on monuments, though they are rarely put center stage. On the one hand, there is the sense that monuments cannot be understood individually, that

3 "War Memorials Register," Imperial War Museums, https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials.

4 A good example is Gavriel David Rosenfeld and Paul B. Jaskot, eds., *Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past*, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

5 Anthony D. Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism," *International Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1996): 445–58.

their meaning derives from their relationship with other monuments and, more broadly, with their wider material and social context—their place in a landscape, or, as we term it, the *monumentscape*. On the other hand, there is the idea that a monument's meaning, and often enough the monument itself, changes over time, and thus monuments, like people, have their own *biographies*.

Writing a collective biography of war memorials

The latter point is perhaps more obvious, not least thanks to prominent interventions by scholars of monuments such as James E. Young. "[T]raditionally," Young writes, "the monument has been defined as that which by its seemingly land-anchored permanence could also guarantee the permanence of a particular idea or memory attached to it. In this conception, the monument would remain essentially impervious to time and change, a perpetual witness-relic to a person, event, or epoch." Accounts of monuments have often focused on the eventful and often controversial stories of their planning and construction, as if the interesting part of a monument's life ended there, turning it into an object of "heritage" with a fixed meaning.[6] "In what might be called 'biographies' of Holocaust memorial sites," Young, in his now classic study *The Texture of Memory*, tried to "reinvigorate otherwise amnesiac stone settings with a record of their own lives in the public mind, with our memory of their past, present, and future."[7] We have increasingly come to accept the idea that the meaning and uses of memorials change over time—an idea that was in essence already formulated by Maurice Halbwachs, one of the founding figures of memory studies.[8] Those

6 This is an instance of what Wulf Kansteiner called the "problem of reception in memory studies"—the bias toward studying the creation of memory messages rather than their reception. See Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," *History and Theory* 41, no. 2 (2002): 192.

7 James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 9. Compare also Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past," *The American Journal of Sociology* 97, no. 2 (1991): 376–420. On the more general idea of biographies of things, albeit with a focus on movable objects, see Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

8 Maurice Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte: étude de mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1941). For an impressive biographical study of two statues in ancient Athens, see Vincent Azoulay, *Les Tyrannicides d'Athènes: vie et mort de deux statues* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014).

most familiar with monuments in present-day Western countries, where forbidding standards of heritage protection often set a high bar for alterations, might be forgiven for assuming that such change primarily concerns their "lives in the public mind" rather than their physical substance. Thus, scholars have sometimes focused on changing perceptions and uses of monuments, on the "choreography of history and memory,"[9] looking in particular at "the space surrounding a statue not only as a symbolic boundary that anchors our perception, but more importantly as a performative stage that invites the audience's actions toward a statue."[10] But as this book will show by drawing on the Ukrainian case, the outward appearance of monuments can also undergo constant change: their sacred status does not necessarily make them immune to repeated reconstructions and transformations, with the emphasis on "repeated": "a closer examination of the history of any object shows that the bad treatments in question take place in a long series of interventions of which they may or may not be the final ones."[11] Perhaps counterintuitively, these modifications often start earlier, and are easier to spot, in peripheral areas than in the center.

Where our approach departs from previous monument biographies is that ours is an exercise in *collective* biography. Biographers of monuments have typically zoomed in on particularly central or significant memorials that are often the focus of national or even international attention, just as there are more biographies of prominent men and women than of comparatively unknown people. Our study, in contrast, looks at a particularly eventful period in the lives not of one or a handful of monuments but of many memorials of a particular type. Our argument is that this can shed at least as much light on important changes as can a focus on a few select sites. In an oft-quoted essay from 1936, Robert Musil, writing about solitary statues, stated that "the most conspicuous thing about monuments is that you don't notice them." Yet two paragraphs later he conceded that this does not apply to monuments that constitute an "association, such as the Bismarck monuments spread across all of Germany."[12]

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9 Suhi Choi, *Embattled Memories: Contested Meanings in Korean War Memorials* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2014), 69.

10 Choi, *Embattled Memories*, 74.

11 Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 25.

12 Robert Musil, "Denkmale," in *Nachlass zu Lebzeiten*, ed. Fred Lönker (Munich: Anaconda, 2023), 62, 63.

There is a more technical way of expressing this and thinking about how changes in the physical appearance of monuments affect their social lives. This is encapsulated in the term "investment in forms," first proposed by sociologist Laurent Thévenot in a seminal paper in 1984.[13] Thévenot observed that the way we perceive and evaluate a situation is often governed by uncertainty. Orientation on which elements of a situation are relevant for action is provided by conventions—agreed upon modes of interpretation that put the otherwise unconnected elements of a situation in a recognizable form. These conventions are not just there; we need to invest time and effort to create them. One way to do this is to modify the physical environment and establish markers that are coded in a certain way. We behave differently in a bank building or a disco, and bulletproof glass or strobe lights are there to remind us of what is appropriate in each environment. The same goes for war memorials: what we do around them depends on a number of physical—primarily visual—cues and how we have learned to respond to them. As we will see in the next chapter, whether we experience a war memorial as sacred, familiar, or profane and how we act around it can have much to do with the materials it is made from and the elements included in it, both by the original designers and by those effecting later modifications. In order for such investments in form to become legible to a large number of people, they need to be repeated across multiple locations.

Thus, our study offers a biography that is collective rather than individual and physical as well as intellectual. In looking at the changes that affected war memorials in Ukraine in 2022–23, and in delving into earlier developments in both Ukraine and Russia that affected these changes, we seek not simply to sum up the lives of many individual monuments but to investigate a monument landscape, or, as we shall call it, a monumentscape.

Monumentscapes

How do we make most sense of "the simultaneous gesture every monument makes to both landscape and memory"?[14]

13 Laurent Thévenot, "Rules and Implements: Investment in Forms," trans. Jill Forbes, *Social Science Information* 23, no. 1 (1984): 1–45.

14 Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 298.

The concept of a "monument landscape" (*Denkmallandschaft*) was introduced by the German art historian and heritage specialist Tilmann Breuer in a 1983 essay[15] and later refined. He did not intend it to designate the sum of all (intentional or unintentional) monuments in a given area. Rather, the term pointed to the connections between monuments and their surrounding areas. "Connection" is the key term here: as Breuer pointed out, "it is the very linking of objects that can be an achievement worth memorializing."[16]

Breuer started from the premise that all monuments exist in social context, and each monument has what he called an "effect-reference space" (*Wirkungsbezugsraum*).[17] The natural or urban landscapes visually dominated by large monuments are examples of such spaces. Breuer speaks of monument landscapes when spaces are physically structured by monuments: entire parks built to highlight symbolically important constructions, as in the city of Potsdam, residence of the Prussian kings; landscapes transformed to suit the needs of a village, city, castle, or industrial facility that sits at its center. Breuer applied the term particularly to places where "there is such a high concentration of objects of historical relevance that we can unequivocally speak of a monument landscape."[18] However, he also argued that generally, "our starting point should no longer be the individual monument that stands in isolation from its surroundings, but rather the cultural landscape as a whole, which includes clusters of monument landscapes."[19] In the broadest perspective, the entire planet has become an ensemble of cultural landscapes, and "every description of the Earth is thus a study of monuments."[20]

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15 Tilmann Breuer, "Denkmallandschaft: Ein Grenzbegriff und seine Grenzen," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, nos. 3–4 (1983): 75–82.

16 Breuer, "Denkmallandschaft," 75.

17 Tilmann Breuer, "Naturlandschaft, Kulturlandschaft, Denkmallandschaft," in *Historische Kulturlandschaften: Internationale Tagung veranstaltet vom Deutschen Nationalkomitee von ICOMOS in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Europarat und dem Landschaftsverband Rheinland—Rheinisches Amt für Denkmalpflege, Abtei Brauweiler, 10.–17. Mai 1992*, ICOMOS—Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees, XI (Munich: Lipp, 1993), 15. Breuer's text was republished alongside English and French translations as Tilmann Breuer, "Natural Landscape, Cultural Landscape, Monument Landscape," in "Heritage without Borders," ed. Sigrid Brandt, Jörg Haspel, and John Ziesemer, *Monumenta* IV (2020): 159–72. In what follows, we sometimes cite and sometimes modify this English translation to bring out the meaning of the German concepts more clearly.

18 Breuer, "Natural Landscape, Cultural Landscape, Monument Landscape," 18.

19 Breuer, "Naturlandschaft, Kulturlandschaft, Denkmallandschaft," 18.

20 Breuer, "Denkmallandschaft," 76.

Breuer's conception of a monument landscape sets a very high definitional bar, one that our discussion in this book inevitably falls short of. We will largely describe what he insists a monument landscape is not: a "region in which certain architectural forms prevail," a "historical landscape," a landscape that frames not just "the past in the present" but continuing historical processes, one that is also a "sacral landscape," understood as a region that experiences the effects of sites considered sacred.[21]

To distinguish our approach from Breuer's while preserving his insights about the social embeddedness of monuments and their connection with territory, we will speak of a "monumentscape." Our understanding of the monumentscape is close to the "memorialscape" which the anthropologist Gillian Carr has defined as referring "to a collection of memorials within a landscape that are inter-related in some way, whether in terms of space, time or event."[22] Carr coined the term to account for "the growing density of memorials and monuments in towns and cities" in Western Europe in the 1970s and 80s.[23] She identified it through ten features:

> (a) the relative centrality or marginality of the memorial within the townscape/landscape; (b) the geographical/spatial/historical relationship to other memorials of the same "event" or group; (c) the geographical/spatial/historical relationship to older monuments which commemorate other events; (d) the inter-visibility of memorials to each other; (e) the shape, size, form and material chosen for the memorial; (f) the date at which the memorial was erected; (g) the condition of the memorial (as a sign of care or abandonment); (h) the use or visitation of the memorial; (i) the instigator of the memorial (which has implications of power and agency); and (j) the biography of the memorial.[24]

Carr inscribes the memorialscape into the study of the wider "memory landscape," which is how Rudy Koshar translated the German *Erinnerungslandschaft* and which includes everything from "monuments,

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21 Breuer, "Denkmallandschaft," 76. See also Kenneth Stanley Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005).

22 Gillian Carr, "Examining the Memorialscape of Occupation and Liberation: A Case Study from the Channel Islands," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 18, no. 2 (2012): 177.

23 Carr, "Examining the Memorialscape," 175.

24 Carr, "Examining the Memorialscape," 177–78.

memorials, and historical buildings to cityscapes, street names, and sites of Nazi atrocities."[25] She is interested in "overarching narratives (and counter-narratives) of the memorialscape." This echoes some of our own concerns: in particular, studying how the Russian narrative of Ukrainian hostility to Great Patriotic War memorials, while false, ended up shaping reality on the ground.

There are three reasons, however, why we speak of a monumentscape rather than a memorialscape.

The first relates to the distinction between—heroic—monuments and—mournful—memorials that is sometimes drawn in the literature on war memory. This distinction arises from the West European context of World War I commemoration, which saw a democratization of war memory and the emergence of distinct forms of mournful rather than celebratory markers of such memory. Those forms of mourning became foundational for the commemoration of World War II: in large swaths of the West, triumphalism became largely taboo and was replaced by mourning and warning. The Soviet tradition of commemorating the Great Patriotic War belatedly took on board many of the features of European World War I commemoration. Yet the distinction between inspiring monuments and sorrowful memorials is difficult to uphold even in Western contexts,[26] and it was always more tenuous and questionable for Soviet war memorials. From the state's perspective, the only good war memorial—even if built atop a mass grave—was one that mobilized visitors for further military and productive feats. In this sense, a war memorial was expected to function in ways not too different from the statue of a leader or cultural figure—as a form of "monumental propaganda," as Vladimir Lenin had designated a short-lived program of monument construction in the early 1920s. As the Soviet state's monopoly on monument building existed in theory rather than practice, mournful war memorials did emerge early on. In the 1960s, when the purposes of war commemoration shifted from mobilization to national and intergenerational cohesion, they became

25 Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), xv.

26 "But in fact, the traditional monument (the tombstone) can also be used as a mourning stone for lost loved ones, just as memorials have marked past victories. A statue can be a monument to heroism and a memorial to tragic loss; an obelisk can memorialize a nation's birth and monumentalize leaders fallen before their prime. Insofar as the same object can perform both functions, there may be nothing intrinsic to historical markers that makes them either a monument or a memorial." Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 3.

more common. Yet the distinction never really took hold. The most heroic-looking monuments could serve as venues for ceremonies of mourning. Conversely, mournful memorials became focal points for self-celebration. Victory Day, the high feast of Soviet war commemoration, epitomized this amalgamation, becoming a "celebration with tears in one's eyes" in the words of a famous song from 1975. While the word "memorial" exists in both Ukrainian and Russian, war memorials are usually designated as "monuments" (*pam'iatnyk/pamiatnik*) in both languages. Thus, in our terminology, we follow James E. Young in that we "treat all memory-sites as memorials, the plastic objects within these sites as monuments. A memorial may be a day, a conference, or a space, but it need not be a monument. A monument, on the other hand, is always a kind of memorial."[27]

The second reason has to do with situating the Ukrainian—and more largely the Soviet and post-Soviet—monumentscape in a wider context. Building on the work of one of the authors of this book, the architectural historian Lucia Allais has identified the Soviet mode of war memorial construction as one of at least three modalities of the "meeting of bureaucracy and monumentality."[28] One was the "SS monumental building economy,"[29] involving massive amounts of forced labor; the other was the "liberal international project of monument survival,"[30] in which a "'monument' became redefined, as any architectural object whose modernity lies not in its style or form, but in its capacity to survive destruction,"[31] leading to the emergence of discourse about "heritage" by the 1980s. The third mode was the Soviet way, which at least in theory presupposed "an aesthetic and bureaucratic standardization"[32] with catalogues of standard types of war memorials that were supposed to be built across former battle zones. This view is echoed by Owen Hatherley, for whom the "landscapes of communism" are defined by architectural elements specific to the formerly communist countries, such as the parade-ready boulevards known as magistrales, the *microrayon* housing districts, and the heroic memorial.[33]

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27 Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 3.

28 Lucia Allais, *Designs of Destruction: The Making of Monuments in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 5.

29 Allais, *Designs of Destruction*, 5, quoting Paul Jaskot.

30 Allais, *Designs of Destruction*, 5.

31 Allais, *Designs of Destruction*, 2.

32 Allais, *Designs of Destruction*, 5.

33 Owen Hatherley, *Landscapes of Communism* (London: Penguin Allen Lane, 2015).

In reality, there was a great deal of variation on the ground, determined by a plethora of actors who modified or ignored the standard-issue designs. In addition, the need to take local specificities into account for both commemorative and propagandistic purposes led to numerous nonstandard monuments being commissioned by the state starting as early as the 1950s.

In fact, the specificity of the Soviet mode of monumentality, seen in global context, lay only partly in uniformity and standardization, which were always circumscribed. At least to the same extent, it resided in a specific attitude toward monument survival and continuity, one that differed from the one that Allais has identified for liberal internationalism. As Julie Deschepper has argued, Soviet preservationism was predicated on the idea that a monument could and should, if necessary, be improved, even if that involved modifying or destroying its material substance and building it anew.[34] If the twentieth-century liberal monument was defined by its capacity to survive destruction, the Soviet monument was defined by its ability to emerge from destruction better than it was before. Thus the Soviet tradition positioned itself squarely at one extreme of the debate, which, since the nineteenth century, had pitted "restorationists" against "preservationists." If, for the preservationists, the monument was a kind of historical document that had to be treated with utmost care, for the Soviet-style restorationists monuments were more like history textbooks, constantly revised and updated to reflect the latest vision of the past. In terms of another long-running distinction, they were icons rather than documents.

As with the liberal internationalist order of monument preservation, this implies considering monuments as more than individual sites: "Instead of being singular, monuments were nodes in a networked plurality"[35]—in our case, a plurality of war memorials collectively testifying to Soviet war heroism. At every stage, in other words, an individual war memorial had to conform to a certain idea of what a war memorial should look like. In the 1960s, this meant replacing earlier constructions with more "modern"-looking memorials, sometimes leading later observ-

34 Julie Deschepper, "Between Future and Eternity: A Soviet Conception of Heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25, no. 5 (2019): 491–506. See also her forthcoming book: Julie Deschepper, *Le temps du patrimoine soviétique: Une histoire matérielle de la Russie* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2024).

35 Allais, *Designs of Destruction*, 4.

ers to deny the very existence of the many memorials built in Ukraine before that decade.[36] During the Russian attack on Ukraine, as we shall see, it implied, for example, adding eternal flames to war memorials where none had burned before, simply because the presence of an eternal flame had become part of the idea of a proper war memorial. This logic was applied not only to war memorials but to monuments more generally, which is why it is important to see what Carr calls the memorialscape as part of the wider monumentscape.

However, there is a third and more general reason for speaking of monumentscapes, which brings us back to Breuer's idea of the cultural landscape as a whole. Some memory scholars tend to downplay the relevance of war memorials in defining a landscape: "Landscape, in any case, is little touched by human concerns for memory: give or take a few centuries, and the battlefields will be ordinary meadows; the memorials insisting on the reality of the deaths that took place will become illegible and crumble away."[37] Yet in a shorter-term perspective, things are very different, not to mention the consensus among historians of landscapes that, since the dawn of the Anthropocene at the latest, they have been shaped by human activity in ways that are crucial if not always self-evident.[38] Martin Pollack has coined the term "contaminated landscapes" to designate landscapes that are outwardly inconspicuous yet conceal traces of past atrocities.[39] Thus even seemingly innocuous landscapes can be entangled in crucial ways with activities that are relevant to "human concerns for memory." This is all the more true of landscapes strewn with deliberately erected memorial markers.

To understand this, it is helpful to consider that what constitutes a landscape is always in the eye of the beholder. The way we map even a "natural" landscape, the features we identify as belonging to it, is never neutral or innocent. As James E. Young notes, "Nature is defined by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel as 'not only plant and ani-

36 See, for example, Yuliya Yurchuk, "Reordering of Meaningful Worlds: Memory of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in Post-Soviet Ukraine," (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 2014), 60.

37 Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 12.

38 Hansjörg Küster, *Geschichte der Landschaft in Mitteleuropa: von der Eiszeit bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 1995).

39 Martin Pollack, *Kontaminierte Landschaften* (St. Pölten: Residenz, 2014).

mal life, but also the landscapes and relics of the country's past.'"[40] Since the map is never identical to the territory it depicts, maps—whether physical or mental—always single out particular elements to include. What counts as a monument, or a war memorial, will vary across times and places. Conversely, monuments—or a lack thereof—can play a role in what we perceive a landscape to consist of. In the Soviet Union after the Second World War, the presence of war memorials gradually became central to marking a territory as Soviet—stressing that it had been liberated from foreign invaders or had sent its sons and daughters to liberate others. War memorials also came to mediate regional identities and emotional connections to local landscapes.[41] As successive antireligious campaigns greatly reduced the number of churches and other sites of worship, war memorials—following the principle that "a sacred space is never empty"[42]—came to supplant them as ritual sites in a Soviet secular religion increasingly centered on the cult of the Great Patriotic War, a tendency that continued at least in some regions of Ukraine after 1991. The fall of the Soviet Union reduced the symbolic standing of Lenin statues, the other altars of Sovietness, for many of the country's residents, leaving war memorials as the only widely accepted sacred landmarks dating from the Soviet period, now rivaled and strongly influenced by markers of new-found Christian (and other) faith.

In trying to explain the ease with which Ukraine's independence was accepted even in seemingly Russified regions of the country, Fabian Baumann has argued that expressions of banal Ukrainian nationalism were widespread in Soviet Ukraine not only in the form of trite bureaucratic tropes but also in visual representations of the republic, such as drawings of its outline.[43] One might add that banal Soviet imperialism—

40 Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 220. Compare the famous "Nine points on monumentality" manifesto from 1943 that starts with the words "Monuments are human landmarks" and goes on to imagine a situation where "Man-made landscapes would be correlated with human landscapes." José-Luis Sert, Fernand Léger, and Sigfried Giedion, "Nine Points on Monumentality," in *Architecture You and Me: The Diary of a Development*, by Sigfried Giedion (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 48–51.

41 Gabowitsch, "Visuals in History Textbooks."

42 Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

43 Fabian Baumann, "'Well-Known and Sincerely Loved': Banal Nationalism, Republican Pride, and Symbolic Ethnicity in Late Soviet Ukraine," *Slavic Review*, forthcoming.

expressing attachment to the entire Union—was no less present.[44] The cult of the Great Patriotic War, and in particular its memorials, combined elements of both.

Thus, depending on the observer and the situation, war memorials can mark a territory both as Soviet and as Ukrainian, as sacred and as familiar. They are Soviet because they celebrate the heroism of Soviet soldiers, and Ukrainian because they have come to be enmeshed with local identities and could be reinterpreted as standing for the liberation of Ukraine in particular. They are sacred by virtue of being associated with holy days of war commemoration, such as Victory Day, and familiar as naturalized parts of the landscape, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, have become thoroughly domesticated by local residents.

To the Russian invaders, the Ukrainianness and local familiarity of memorials were largely invisible. They saw memorials to the Great Patriotic War as sacred embodiments of Sovietness, which in Russia much more strongly than in Ukraine has been reinterpreted as an expression of national—in this case: Russian—identity. Thus the Russians saw war memorials as physical proof of a landscape's intrinsic Sovietness and, by extension, its affiliation with Russia as the undisputed guardian of the Soviet legacy.

Russia's tools for mapping this monumentscape were imperfect: its soldiers do not appear to have used the available online or print directories that attempt to list war memorials and other monuments by region, the way both Axis and Allied forces in the Second World War used Baedeker guides to target, or avoid targeting, cultural monuments. Expecting a three-day conquest with little resistance, the Russians do not seem to have mapped monuments out in advance at all, or indeed made any maps of targets to avoid. Unlike the Allied Monuments Men in the Second World War and more like the Axis Powers, they viewed the territory they were conquering as one to be looted, transformed, and Russified rather than preserved or salvaged.

Yet war memorials were an exception in that, rhetorically at least, they were singled out for protection. At the same time, focusing on monuments helped the occupiers to reimagine the Ukrainian landscape as a set of

44 For the notion of "banal imperialism," see Krishan Kumar, "Empire, Nation, and National Identities," in *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Andrew Thompson (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 298–329.

manageable and familiar points rather than as a vast, ungovernable, and unexpectedly unfamiliar horizontal expanse.

What, in our case, turns a collection of monuments into a monumentscape, then, are at least two things. On the one hand, it is the family resemblance between different monuments, in this case, between different war memorials. While they do not all follow a standard pattern, the similarities between them are significant enough and provided invading Russian soldiers with a sense of familiarity, of orientation in a landscape that was otherwise less familiar than expected—a point to which we will return in the conclusion. On the other hand, it is the sense that every monument in a monumentscape should be an element in a network. This network is symbolic and narrative, commemorating not just local heroism and sacrifice but that of a larger collective, however defined. Yet it is also material: as Allais argues with regard to the US Monuments Men in the Second World War, "oscillation between protecting a monument's concrete form and its transmissible content was constitutive of monuments protection."[45]

Contesting the monumentscape: From "disputed territories" to imperial irredentism

This view of the monumentscape can help us gain a new perspective on the nexus between memory, heritage, and territorial domination or conflict. We believe that studying Russia's treatment of war memorials in occupied Ukraine can serve to advance at least two recent scholarly discussions that focus on these themes.

One line of inquiry has concerned the relationship between memory, heritage, and disputed territories. Scholars from the DisTerrMem project have studied post-conflict societies and the role of nation states and regional and diasporic organizations in managing memories of disputed territories. Their work has focused on post-conflict situations and peacebuilding or reconciliation efforts in Europe, the Caucasus, and South Asia. They have argued for an agonistic framework that would leave space for different rival memories connected to specific places instead of trying to

45 Allais, *Designs of Destruction*, 76.

merge them in a single overarching "cosmopolitan" narrative.[46] While accommodating a battle of ideas about the proper management of memories and heritage sites, the basic idea of agonism is that such conflict should be respectful: "democratic conflict should not involve seeing others as enemies to be destroyed, but rather as adversaries whose ideas may be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to exist and to defend those ideas should never be called into question."[47] The idea of agonism has some value for thinking about the management of Soviet war memorials on territories that are not directly touched by war, and we will return to it in the conclusion. However, it clearly has limited purchase in situations of ongoing military conflict, such as Russia's attack on Ukraine, which is premised precisely on denying that country the very right to exist. We need accounts not simply of disputed heritage but of heritage at war—not least because the potential of heritage to provoke, justify, and structure military conflict will always hang as a threat over attempts to pacify its management through agonistic approaches. (Not to mention that the notion of "disputed territories" doesn't really fit the Russian-Ukrainian war: from the Russian perspective, whatever territories its soldiers managed to occupy became, by that token, "disputed."[48])

The second line of inquiry concerns the nexus between heritage, (post-) colonialism, and imperialism. The literature about colonialism and its aftereffects remains dominated by contributions from or about countries colonized by West European maritime powers. This also goes for interest in post-colonialism and heritage;[49] when Central and Eastern Europe are discussed, it is usually in relation to their implication in Western imperial projects.[50] A large part of the discussion is devoted to the colonial-era

46 See https://web.archive.org/web/20240406061234/https://www.disterrmem.eu/.

47 Shauna Robertson, "Agonistic Memory: A Brief Introduction," *DisTerrMem* (blog), May 8, 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20211121203616/https://www.disterrmem.eu/blog/agonistic-memory-a-brief-introduction.

48 A point made by Tatiana Zhurzhenko in the discussion after her keynote lecture "The Politics of Memory in the Ukrainian-Russian Conflict: From the Orange Revolution to the Annexation of Crimea to Russia's Full-Scale invasion" at the 2nd PoSoCoMeS conference in Tallinn, September 20, 2023.

49 Kynan Gentry, *History, Heritage, and Colonialism: Historical Consciousness, Britishness, and Cultural Identity in New Zealand, 1870–1940*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); *(Post)Colonialism and Cultural Heritage: International Debates at the Humboldt Forum* (Munich: Hanser, 2021).

50 Britta Timm Knudsen et al., eds., *Decolonizing Colonial Heritage: New Agendas, Actors and Practices in and beyond Europe*, Critical Heritages of Europe (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2022).

theft of cultural heritage and the question of restitution. When imperial heritage itself is critiqued for its post-colonial effects, it is typically for its role in perpetuating colonial-era identities and forms of domination, not for its potential to legitimize imperial reconquest. More recently, the discussion about both post-coloniality and decoloniality in reference to the former Soviet Union has moved from a sophisticated but niche academic debate[51] to a much larger stage, but much of it concerns language, literature, and contemporary art rather than heritage.

Yet the case of the maritime empires can hardly count as paradigmatic for the role of heritage in post-imperial situations more generally. Unlike the typically gradual loss of overseas colonies by the West European powers, the demise of the three big European-Eurasian land-based empires in 1917/18 led to the dissolution of entire states, including the political collapse and social transformation of the metropolis. Only one of the three continued in modified form (the Soviet Union replacing the Russian Empire) and engaged in some imperial reconquest during the Second World War, before collapsing in turn in 1991. Post-Habsburg and post-Ottoman history is full of cases of irredentism that involved disputes over cultural heritage and in particular the vestiges and markers of past wars. The same goes for post-Soviet history. Post-imperial policies have also involved military action and national homogenization (including through heritage) of ethnic margins that formally remained part of the truncated metropolis (Kurdish territories in Turkey; Chechnya). However, with the exception of the Second World War, the long post-imperial history of the land-based empires has never involved former imperial centers seeking to reconquer lands and reconstitute their empires. This is what makes the Russian invasion of Ukraine since 2014 so unique.

Russia's attack on Ukraine has rightly been described as imperialist and colonialist. For our purposes, however, it is most helpful to designate it as an act of attempted imperial reconquest, or imperialist irredentism. Irredentism can be defined most generally as "a policy of advocating the restoration to a country of any territory formerly belonging to

51 For postcolonial approaches, see Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2011) and the *Postcolonial Perspectives on Eastern Europe* book series edited by Dirk Uffelmann, Alfred Gall, and Mirja Lecke and published by Peter Lang. For decolonial approaches, see Madina Tlostanova, *What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet? Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

it."[52] This has become the norm in justifications of wars of conquest: "the public discourse of territorial expansionism," as Alexander B. Murphy writes, "is essentially a call for restitution of that which was improperly taken away."[53] However, Russia's particular variety of irredentism is imperial in that its arguments for forcibly altering state borders go beyond the claim that the territories it seeks to conquer are populated by ethnic Russians. The Russian regime maintains that the present-day Russian state has a claim to territories formerly controlled by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union *qua* these territories' imperial history. Conversely, Russia's attack is also part of the long story of Russian imperial collapse. Furthermore, what makes the Russian invasion a case of imperial irredentism is the underlying idea that empires, or great powers, have the right to treat "mere" nation states as buffer zones; hence, the repeated Russian claims that Ukrainian statehood and sovereignty are somehow not real.

The role of memory and heritage in territorial disputes is often described in terms of conflict between two different ethnonational communities, each of which has their own vision of which community a territory belongs to, and why. However, situations of imperial irredentism complicate matters further: rather than simply claiming Ukrainian territory, and its monuments, for the Russians as an ethnic group rather than the Ukrainians, Russia asserted that it had a *shared* history with Ukraine, as evidenced by monuments, yet claimed for itself the sole right to interpret the meaning of that shared history. In practice, as we will show in this book, ethnonationalist irredentism and imperialist irredentism tended to merge, with some monument policies aiming to erase all traces of Ukrainianness and others accommodating it as part of a shared history as long as it remained subordinated to Russian visions of a Soviet and imperial past.

Iconoclasm or heritage protection?

Another conceptual point needs to be addressed here.

At first glance, our study may be seen as relating primarily to iconoclasm, the destruction of images. Indeed, one of the first things the

52 According to the Oxford Languages dictionary embedded in Google's search engine.

53 Alexander B. Murphy, "Historical Justifications for Territorial Claims," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 4 (1990): 533.

Russian invaders did during their advance into Ukraine was to destroy monuments such as those honoring the dead of earlier Ukrainian resistance against Russia or those displaying symbols of Ukrainian statehood. However, as this book will show, that was only one among many facets of Russia's interaction with Ukrainian war memorials, and by no means the most prominent one. Nor did the Russian soldiers, unlike many iconoclasts throughout the ages, act out of a general opposition to images or a mistrust of all representation. They were not out to destroy all war memorials, just those of a certain type. Indeed, protecting monuments was a much more prominent part of their discourse than destroying them. Thus, in their own understanding at least, they were engaged in iconorestorationism rather than iconoclasm. Their justifications for doing so were often muddled: Russian public discourse was primarily outraged by the destruction of straightforwardly communist statuary such as Lenin statues, and by acts of removal of war memorials in countries other than Ukraine, such as Poland and Estonia. Yet in the occupied Ukrainian territories they ended up interacting mostly with war memorials, which had in fact been left largely untouched by previous waves of Ukrainian decommunization. Having believed their own propaganda about Ukrainian "Nazis" removing Soviet war memorials, the occupiers now had to devise original ways of rebuilding monuments that were in no need of restoration, as we detail in chapter 4. Overall, their monument policies were more "reconstructive" than "deconstructive," their vandalism, in a distinction proposed by Charles de Montalembert in 1833, more "restorative" than "destructive."[54]

Still, restoring monuments to what the occupiers thought of as their previous condition required removing everything considered to adulterate that authentic state. In addition, the Russian invasion and its attendant monument policies caused iconoclastic responses on the Ukrainian side: as discussed in chapter 6, the large-scale Russian attack led to a wave of monument removal on free Ukrainian territory that targeted monuments seen as Soviet or Russian. This makes observations on past instances of iconoclasm relevant to our case.

54 For the distinction between reconstructive and deconstructive heritage policies, see Peter Polak-Springer, *Recovered Territory: A German-Polish Conflict over Land and Culture, 1919–89* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 220–21. For Montalembert's distinction between destructive and restorative vandalism, see Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 23.

In Ancient Greece, the idea of iconoclasm in the modern sense did not exist. Monuments were routinely "updated" to reflect new views, but such modification was not understood or represented as an act of destruction or erasure.[55] In other cultures, however, iconoclasts have typically placed the iconoclastic act itself center stage. In his study of monument destruction in the territory of present-day Iraq throughout the ages, Aaron Tugendhaft writes: "Iconoclasm does not remove images so much as generate new ones. From the French Revolution to the Chinese Cultural Revolution to the recent campaign to remove Confederate monuments in the United States, acts of iconoclasm have survived through the depiction of those acts."[56] Tugendhaft's statement might not be universally applicable—there have also been acts of iconoclasm known to us chiefly through traces of the images destroyed—but it certainly holds true of the destruction of monuments in the Russian war on Ukraine. The destruction was amply documented, and where it was deliberate, the monument topplers on both sides nearly always made sure to document the act. Destruction resulted not simply in empty spaces or orphaned pedestals waiting to support new (or returning old) monuments, but in images of the act of destruction and its immediate aftermath. Like other iconoclasts, those on both sides of the ongoing war preserved images of the toppled monuments through the very act of circulating images (photos and videos) of the act of destruction—and in some cases by taking them to less public locations such as museums or specially arranged open-air displays (though regarding memorials removed by the Russian forces we found only one case where this was not just promised but actually done).

These images always carried an intense emotional charge. They embodied the power of the destroyers to shape public space according to their values and their exhilaration at ridding it of offending symbols. They also placed the toppled monuments at the forefront of debate, with some of them attracting considerably more attention through the act of their demolition than they ever had before. These images are among the sources we have used for our book, as are the even more numerous images of (real

55 Maurizio Giangiulio, Elena Franchi, and Giorgia Proietti, eds., *Commemorating War and War Dead: Ancient and Modern* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2019). See also Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 26–27.

56 Aaron Tugendhaft, *The Idols of ISIS. From Assyria to the Internet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 75. For a similar observation see Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 32.

or spurious) monument maintenance or (re-)construction churned out by Russian propaganda.

Much of what Tugendhaft and other scholars of iconoclasm[57] have to say about the global history of the phenomenon also applies to the wave of monument removal that swept the free parts of Ukraine after February 2022. As in virtually all cases of post-socialist iconoclasm, those engaged in removing the remaining public markers of the Russian and Soviet presence never questioned the importance of public monuments per se. They simply sought to replace monuments to perceived oppression and foreign rule with those embodying the nation's sovereignty and struggle for freedom.

These acts of de-Sovietization and de-Russification have already generated much complex debate and scholarship. While we briefly touch upon them, especially insofar as unlike the earlier decommunization campaigns they have targeted some war memorials, our main topic is the treatment of war memorials in the Russian-occupied parts of the country. In some ways, this treatment overlapped with age-old traditions of iconoclasm: like the Qur'ānic prophets, the Russian invaders saw the removal of false idols (such as monuments to Ukraine's struggle against Russia since 2014) as a return to an older state of purity. The twist was that this purity and normalcy was not pictured as a total absence of public monuments, nor even primarily as a blank slate prior to the construction of new ones, as in the ancient Assyrian reliefs that show the smashing of an older king's statue alongside the construction of monuments to the new king.[58] It was quintessentially embodied by existing Soviet memorials to the dead of the Great Patriotic War, which were already more numerous in the now-occupied territories than were post-Soviet Ukrainian monuments referencing other wars. Thus, unlike in many other cases of conquest or revolution, restoration and renovation loomed larger in Russia's treatment of monuments than did outright destruction and replacement. Yet like all reactionaries, the Russians ended up producing something new

57 Sergiusz Michalski, ed., *Les iconoclasmes* (Strasbourg: Société alsacienne pour le développement de l'histoire de l'art, 1992); Alain Besançon, *L'image interdite: Une histoire intellectuelle de l'iconoclasme* (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Winfried Speitkamp, ed., *Denkmalsturz: Zur Konfliktgeschichte politischer Symbolik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*.

58 Tugendhaft, *The Idols of ISIS*, 76–77.

in the name of restoring the old—both materially on the ground and in terms of the images they generated.

There is another important dimension of the wartime treatment of monuments in general and war memorials in particular, beyond their role in shaping public space and infusing it with one set of symbols or another. At least in some situations, monuments serve not just as *representations* of certain figures—be it a Tsar, a writer, a mythical character, or a fallen soldier—but as actual *embodiments* of those figures, as ways to extend their presence into new spaces or beyond death. "Statues are dead people cast in bronze or carved in stone."[59] This is particularly salient in traditionally Orthodox lands where, following Roman and Byzantine traditions, icons have traditionally been seen as physical embodiments of the divine, and images of the emperor or other figures have been treated as ways in which these figures can be present somewhere other than their physical location.[60] Yet at times of iconoclasm in particular, treating a person's effigy as an embodiment of that person is quite common across cultures; indeed, this perception is one of the mainsprings of iconoclasm, which tends to "associate a real figure with its commemorative form."[61]

These observations are relevant to many of the varied ways of interacting with memorials that we describe in this book, beyond iconoclasm. Those who annihilate, wreck, remove, alter, paint, renovate, or expand a memorial are sending a message to others in society—a message about the kind of community they seek to create or destroy and legitimize through symbols. But in addition, they are also interacting with the (mostly) dead, whose presence is embodied in the monuments themselves. They assign them a place in the social hierarchy by elevating, demoting, or humiliating them; they reappropriate and remobilize dead soldiers by changing the decorations on their statues or by rearranging or expanding the list of names over a communal grave; they turn heroes back into

59 Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*, The Harriman Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 5.

60 Clemena Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World with the Eyes of God* (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010); Clemena Antonova, *Visual Thought in Russian Religious Philosophy: Pavel Florensky's Theory of the Icon* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Mischa Gabowitsch, "Emblems of Authority, Symbols of Protest: Crowds and the Materiality of Their Signs," *Social Research* 90, no. 2 (2023): 337–72.

61 Małgorzata Praczyk, "Émotions en action: L'histoire comparative du vandalisme et de la destruction des monuments commémoratifs allemands à Strasbourg et Poznań en 1918 et 1919," in *Les marques du voisinage: l'Alsace et la Posnanie dans l'ombre des influences germaniques*, ed. Maciej Forycki et al. (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2019), 119.

ordinary people by domesticating a heroic monument and treating it like a family grave.

Yet if iconoclasm is not the main heading under which Russia's treatment of war memorials in the occupied Ukrainian territories can be discussed, then what is? Following Julie Deschepper, we argue that what the invaders engaged in followed a peculiarly Soviet and Russian tradition of heritage management, one that privileges reconstruction and improvement over material preservation and does not shy away from destroying a monument in order to rebuild it better.[62]

Discussions of "heritage" often skip over war memorials. The patriotic messages such memorials usually carry make them too political to fit neatly into this category. Nor do most of them present enough artistic originality to be of much interest to the art historian. Frequently they are relegated to the study of nationalism, propaganda, and political symbolism, which tends to flatten their materiality and consider them only as two-dimensional symbols capable (or incapable) of mobilizing people in the service of patriotic ideas.

In the study of Soviet and post-Soviet monuments in particular, the distinctive features of war memorials have frequently been blurred. Discourse about monument construction and removal often fails to distinguish between statues of political or cultural figures and memorials to dead soldiers, as if they were no more than variants of the same type of political propaganda. In addition, as mentioned above, much discussion has focused on large, well-known memorials in big cities rather than the more numerous ones in small towns and villages. In the case of Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries, local contexts and meanings are often key to understanding how and why war memorials are built, maintained, and modified, and under what conditions they are seen as expressing something authentic. Thus our case puts in relief one of the central tensions implicit in definitions of heritage: that between authenticity and originality.

The impulse to build a war memorial to honor the local fallen is often itself local—that was the case even in the Soviet Union, which despite its vertical political structure never had a single central agency in charge of building war memorials. Yet the expectation that such monuments

62 Deschepper, "Between Future and Eternity." See also her forthcoming book: Deschepper, *Le temps du patrimoine soviétique: Une histoire matérielle de la Russie*.

will be built is national, as are many of the available forms. Thus, even though they are very different from the standardized statues of leaders, war memorials too are part of the tradition that Alexander Etkind has described as internal colonization or, more largely, the process of nationalization or imperial control, of turning local stories and objects into part of national or imperial history.[63] Empire is a style: if Habsburg rule meant to have a baroque chapel in every village,[64] Soviet rule in its late stages meant that there was no village without a war memorial. The result is often to make war memorials appear standardized, unoriginal, and therefore devoid of local authenticity. Soviet war memorials were simultaneously expressions of local mourning *and* markers of imperial control.

This makes war memorials vulnerable to a loss of perceived value in situations of regime change, such as Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity in 2014. There has been a temptation to see them as no more than artistically worthless expressions of Soviet propaganda, despite their originally protected status. Against this, at least three different strategies have been used to turn them into heritage worth protecting.

One, employed by Ukrainian art historians and preservationists such as the *De Ne De* group ("Here and There"), has been to nationalize and thereby de-Sovietize monuments by stressing that they were designed not by generic Soviet, but by *Ukrainian* Soviet sculptors and architects.[65]

Another, employed by local residents and amply discussed in the next chapter, has been to domesticate monuments. This has been done primarily by altering some aspects of their appearance—adding or highlighting individual names, for example, or painting memorials in multiple colors—and generally extending practices associated with family graves to local war memorials.

The third and most radical approach has been that taken by the Russian invaders. Rather than resituating the significance of war memorials down

63 Etkind, *Internal Colonization*; Ana Maria Alonso, "The Effects of Truth: Re-Presentations of the Past and the Imagining of Community," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988): 33–57.

64 Robert John Weston Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1700: An Interpretation* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1979). See also Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra, "The Things They Carried: War, Mobility, and Material Culture," in *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement*, ed. Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 9–10.

65 On *De Ne De,* see Oksana Semenyk, "Mistse dlia mista: iak entuziasty nesuť suchasnu kulʹturu v malenʹki naseleni punkty Ukraïny," *Platforma*, March 20, 2017, http://projects.platfor.ma/de-ne-de. See also the group's website at https://www.facebook.com/denedenede.

the scale from the imperial to the national to the local, they have resolutely tried to reimpose imperial meanings. In order to do so, they have not hesitated to "improve" monuments when deemed necessary, for example by adding an eternal flame where none had burned before or by adorning a memorial with a Soviet Victory Banner.

That conquest, in this case, has been associated not only with tearing down monuments but also with protecting them (or claiming to do so) must prompt us to rethink the almost automatic association between military conflict and iconoclasm.

These themes will remain with us throughout this book. For now, though, we must first provide more detail about the historical background against which the events of 2022–23 took place.

Chapter 2
Historical Background: War Memorials in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine

This chapter offers an overview of war memorials in Ukraine. Our approach here is to stay close to the ground by discussing existing war memorials in all their diversity, as well as some of the associated local practices. In contrast to studies that focus primarily on national-level memory politics, we leave treatment of grand historical narratives and mnemonic controversies until after this empirical survey. At the end of the chapter, we offer a detailed discussion of recent changes to war memorials in rural Ukraine, which are particularly relevant to our topic.

The Soviet period

In both world wars and the conflicts of 1917–1923, the territory of present-day Ukraine was the scene of some of the deadliest fighting and some of the worst violence against civilians. Memorials to the First World War are relatively scarce. The Bolsheviks dismissed it as an imperialist war not worth commemorating, and the military cemeteries created in Galicia, Volhynia, and Bukovina under Austro-Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian rule in the interwar period fell into disrepair—if not deliberately destroyed—after these regions were incorporated into Soviet Ukraine at the close of the Second World War.[1] Monuments to what Soviet tradition called the Civil War—a blanket term that hides interlocking conflicts such as the

1 On the memory and memorials to World War I in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, see Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011); Aaron J. Cohen, *War Monuments, Public Patriotism, and Bereavement in Russia, 1905–2015* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020). On World War I cemeteries in Galicia, see *Sztuka w mundurze*.

Figure 2.1. Early Civil War memorial in Zmiïv, Kharkiv region. The monument on the right is a repurposed civilian tombstone from the late 19th or early 20th century. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2021.

Figure 2.2. Late socialist Civil War memorial on route N11 in the Novyi Buh municipality, Mykolaïv region. The inscription has been removed and the flag has been repainted blue-and-yellow. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2023.

Polish-Ukrainian War of 1918–19, the Ukrainian-Soviet War of 1917–21, and the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–21—are more common. Those built in Soviet Ukraine in the interwar period were mostly fragile constructions built on local initiative (see figure 2.1). Just like the few surviving memorials to Polish victims in the Galician lands,[2] they were often poorly maintained since early attempts to create a commemorative culture around the Red Army's victory never took off, and with some famous exceptions—such as Ivan Kavaleridze's reinforced concrete monument from 1927 to the Bolshevik leader Fedor Sergeev (Artem) near Sviatohirs'k

2 Yulia Abibok, "Victims, Perpetrators and 'Our Guys': Interethnic Relations and Mass Massacres in Eastern Galicia" (Lecture, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies/Institute for East European History, University of Vienna, January 18, 2023).

Figure 2.3. A Civil War memorial known as The Legendary Machine-Gun Cart (*Lehendarna Tachanka*) was installed in Kakhovka, Kherson region, in 1967 to mark the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution. In the Soviet period the memorial was a fixture of regional souvenirs such as figurines, desk awards, medallions, and pins. The photo was taken in an antique shop in Heniches'k, Kherson region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, November 2019.

in the Donets'k region, a famous example of cubo-futurism in Ukrainian Soviet art—they retain a local significance at best (see figure 2.1). Most of the Civil War monuments that did gain greater prominence were built in the 1960s and 70s, buoyed by the cult of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 (see figures 2.2 and 2.3).

Monuments to that latter war are by far the most widespread type of war memorial. Russia-centric accounts of war commemoration have often claimed that monument construction only took off inside the Soviet Union in the mid-1960s, yet recent research by Ukrainian and other historians has shown that commemorative practices and monument construction never abated in Ukraine after 1944. Monument building in Ukraine reflected the need to Sovietize regions recently annexed to the Soviet Union as well as encapsulated the profound impact that the Second World War had had on a republic that the Germans and their allies had occupied in its entirety.[3] Ukrainian experiences and initiatives were cru-

3 Roman Khandozhko, Aliaksei Lastouski, and Iryna Sklokina, *Rethinking the Memory of the "Great Patriotic War" from the Local Perspective: Stalinism and the Thaw, 1943–1965* (Kharkiv: Kharkivs'ke istoryko-filolohichne tovarystvo, 2013); I.E. Sklokina, "Pam'iat' pro Druhu svitovu viinu ta natsysts'ku okupatsiiu Ukraïny v povsiakdennykh praktykakh

Figure 2.4. Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Serhiïvka, Dnipropetrovs'k region, with a monument erected soon after the war and a larger one from the 1960s. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, February 2020.

cial to the formation of a USSR-wide cult of the Great Patriotic War in the 1960s,[4] which led to many of the earlier monuments being replaced by somewhat more standardized memorials (though occasionally the old ones remained; see figure 2.4). There is not a single *hromada* (urban or rural municipality) in Ukraine, including places founded after 1945, that does not have at least one memorial to the World War II dead, commemorating local soldiers and civilians as well as soldiers from other parts of the Soviet Union who died defending or liberating the area, and ranging from small obelisks to larger-than-life bronze statues. Not least of all,

radians'koho suspil'stva (1953–1985)," *Visnyk Kharkivs'koho universytetu. Seriia: Istoriia*, no. 44 (2011): 199–219; Iryna Sklokina, "Commemorating the Glorious Past, Dreaming of the Happy Future: WWII Burial Places and Monuments as Public Places in Postwar Ukraine," in *The Political Cult of the Dead in Ukraine: Traditions and Dimensions from Soviet Times to Today*, ed. Guido Hausmann and Iryna Sklokina (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2021), 69–96; Pavlo Leno, "Memorializatsiia 'vyzvolyteliv' u period preventyvnoï radianizatsiï Zakarpattia (1944–1946 rr.)," *Naukovyi visnyk Uzhhorods'koho universytetu, seriia "Istoriia"*, no. 2 (45) (2021): 142.

4 Mischa Gabowitsch, "Victory Day before the Cult: War Commemoration in the USSR, 1945–65," in *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. David L. Hoffmann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 64–85.

hundreds of grassroots monuments built during the Soviet period commemorate victims of the Holocaust despite an informal taboo on public discussions of Nazi anti-Semitic violence.[5]

Post-Soviet changes: Expanding the memorial canon

Given the sacrosanct status of Great Patriotic War memorials, those commemorating other conflicts and tragedies have often sought a share in their legitimacy. In turn, as the public memory of those who died in other, once-controversial events is consecrated, their memorials are used to honor victims of more contentious or lesser-known conflicts. In addition, the shape, number, and location of memorials also reflect political and institutional conflicts over memory.[6]

These developments are perhaps illustrated most vividly by the memory of the 1979–1989 Soviet-Afghan War. The Soviet Union and the post-Soviet states did not initially sponsor any commemoration of that war, which many saw as a tragic and senseless mistake that ended in humiliation, in contrast with the sacred triumph in the Great Patriotic War. However, since the final years of the USSR, veterans of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan have been erecting monuments to their fallen comrades on their own account.[7] In Ukraine, just as in other former Soviet republics, they have often added them to existing memorial sites, which tend to be centered around Great Patriotic War commemoration. In Kherson's Park of Glory, the city's central location for war commemoration, the corner furthest removed from the dominant memorial to the Great Patriotic War memorial features not one but two separate monuments honoring "internationalist warriors" who died in the Soviet-Afghan War and other conflicts outside the former USSR, reflecting the existence of multiple organizations of veterans of such conflicts in the city.

Many such multi-purpose commemorative sites have also come to include memorials to the Chornobyl' liquidators. In post-Soviet Ukraine,

5 Arkadi Zeltser, *Unwelcome Memory: Holocaust Monuments in the Soviet Union*, trans. A. S. Brown (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Publications, 2018).

6 For a bibliography of work on local and regional memory dynamics in Ukraine, including around monuments, see Yurchuk, "Reordering of Meaningful Worlds," 11.

7 Iryna Sklokina, "Veterans of the Soviet–Afghan War and the Ukrainian Nation-Building Project: From Perestroika to the Maidan and the War in the Donbas," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, no. 2 (2015): 133–67.

memorials to victims of the Holodomor terror-famine and of other Stalinist repressions have sometimes been appended to them, though the most prominent ones are built in separate locations. The same goes for monuments to Holocaust victims. Memorials to all of these tragedies have been combined or separated in different and often unexpected ways; thus, in Ivankiv, Kyiv region, liquidators of the disaster at the nearby Chornobyl' nuclear plant are commemorated in the same location as Holocaust victims from Ivankiv's once-thriving Jewish community.[8]

Thus, like many other countries and in particular most post-Soviet states, Ukraine has seen what Viktoriya Sereda has called a "hybridization" of its memorial landscape.[9] It is common to see the dead of the Civil War, the Holodomor, the Second World War, the Holocaust, the Chornobyl' nuclear catastrophe, the Soviet-Afghan War and other "internationalist" engagements, the Euromaidan, and/or the Anti-Terrorist Operation commemorated in one place. Such hybridization is widespread across the former Soviet republics; however, what makes the phenomenon particularly interesting in Ukraine is that it establishes lines of continuity between Ukraine's Soviet and post-Soviet history and commemorative culture despite efforts to repudiate the Soviet period and decommunize memory that have loomed large in outside perceptions of public memory in post-Euromaidan Ukraine. Typically, these hybrid "sacred spaces" are to be found in different locations than old and new monuments to political and cultural figures, such as the now largely dismantled Lenin statues or statues of, for example, hetman (military leader) Bohdan Khmel'nyts'skyi (1595–1657), the poet Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861), or the historian and statesman Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi (1866–1934).[10]

Moreover, Ukraine exhibits several twists on this generic post-Soviet phenomenon. One of them is more pronounced in the western parts of the country. The many monuments to fighters and leaders associated with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and/or the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) that have sprung up across Ukraine are particularly numerous in this region, including but by no means limited to the

8 Mykola Homanyuk's field observations.

9 Victoriya Sereda, "Politics of Memory and Urban Landscape: The Case of Lviv after World War II," in *Time, Memory, and Cultural Change*, vol. 25, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference Proceedings (Vienna: IWM, 2009), https://files.iwm.at/jvfc/25_7_Sereda.pdf.

10 On the old and new national pantheon of figures deemed statue-worthy, see Liebich, Myshlovska, and Sereda, "The Ukrainian Past and Present."

well-known figure of Stepan Bandera (1909–1959).[11] They coexist with monuments not only to Red Army soldiers, many of whom fought against the Ukrainian nationalists, but also—especially in rural areas—with surviving Soviet-era memorials to civilians killed by Ukrainian nationalists during and after the Second World War (see figure 2.5).[12] Matthias Kaltenbrunner has called this phenomenon, particularly dominant in the 1990s and early 2000s, "all-inclusive commemoration," based on the assumption that "any villager involved in armed combat anywhere during the twentieth century … somehow did it for Ukraine or its independence."[13] He argues that this respectful treatment of ideologically diverse war memorials reflected a desire to avoid conflict at a local level. However, this is not just a matter of separate mnemonic communities tolerating each other's memorials. In her work on the memory of the OUN-UPA in the Rivne region in the early 2010s, Yuliya Yurchuk observes that one and the same person can honor monuments to ideologically diverse adversaries, and speaks of the "pick and mix" nature of mundane memory.[14] André Liebich, Oksana Myshlovska, and Viktoriya Sereda refer to the same phenomenon as "syncretic or parallel versions of memory at the local and individual levels."[15]

The other Ukrainian peculiarity is especially visible in the country's southern and eastern regions. Instead of simply placing new memorials

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11 Yurchuk, "Reordering of Meaningful Worlds"; Andre Liebich and Oksana Myshlovska, "Bandera: Memorialization and Commemoration," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 5 (September 3, 2014): 750–70; Oksana Myshlovska, "The Sacralization of the Ukrainian Statehood and the Nation: The Cult of Stepan Bandera and the Fighters for Ukrainian Independence in Western Ukraine," in *The Political Cult of the Dead in Ukraine: Traditions and Dimensions from the First World War to Today*, ed. Guido Hausmann and Iryna Sklokina (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2021), 239–72.

12 In addition, a number of new memorials to UPA victims have been put up in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine by local actors opposed to a rehabilitation of the UPA. See Liebich, Myshlovska, and Sereda, "The Ukrainian Past and Present," 91.

13 Matthias Kaltenbrunner, *Das global vernetzte Dorf: eine Migrationsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus, 2017), 372. See also John Lehr and Natalia Aponiuk, "Memory, Myth and Monuments: The Commemoration of a Contested Past in Western Ukraine," *Memory Connection* 1, no. 1 (2011): 212–28. Andrii Portnov documents attempts to establish a similar all-inclusive commemoration at the national level during Viktor Iushchenko's tenure as president: Andrii Portnov, "'Velyka Vitchyzniana viina' v politykakh pam'iati Bilorusi, Moldovy ta Ukraïny: kiľka porivniaľnykh sposterezhen'," *Ukraïna Moderna*, no. 15(4) (2009): 216.

14 Yurchuk, "Reordering of Meaningful Worlds," xvii–xviii; 10.

15 Liebich, Myshlovska, and Sereda, "The Ukrainian Past and Present," 89. See also Liebich and Myshlovska, "Bandera," 760.

Figure 2.5. A stele (on the left) honoring civilians killed by Ukrainian nationalists during and after WWII was added to a Great Patriotic War memorial from the early 1970s in Rusiv, Ivano-Frankivs'k region. In 1994, a cross was installed to commemorate all the fallen of the Second World War. Photo: Matthias Kaltenbrunner, September 2019, published with permission.[16]

to the more recently dead in the vicinity of Great Patriotic War memorials, local residents sometimes add their names directly to existing monuments or redesign them to commemorate different conflicts equally despite the very different status that they have in public memory.

One of the most striking memorials of this kind is located in central Kharkiv (see figure 2.6). Unveiled in 1997 as a monument to the so-called "internationalist warriors" who died as Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan, it was redesigned in 2011 to cover a dizzying range of other conflicts. The memorial is a semi-circular wall displaying lists of names, arranged around a chapel-like central stele with a Christian cross, whose base features a five-pointed star. It now extends the title of "internationalist warriors" to Kharkiv residents who died in all of the Soviet Union's military engagements except the Civil War and the Great Patriotic War, as well as a range of post-Soviet wars in which the Ukrainian state was not involved. The conflicts mentioned include the Spanish Civil War; 1938–40 cam-

16 For context, see Kaltenbrunner, *Das global vernetzte Dorf*.

Figure 2.6. Memorial to "internationalist warriors" in Kharkiv. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, January 2022.

paigns against Poland, Finland, and Japan; Cold War engagements ranging from Hungary and Czechoslovakia to Korea and Angola; and more recent wars such as those in Iraq and Syria. Separate plaques honor those decorated as Heroes of the Soviet Union or Heroes of Ukraine, regardless of how and when they died—including participants in the wars in Korea and Afghanistan as well as the Anti-Terrorist Operation begun in 2014.

Other post-Soviet memorials honor Soviet and post-Soviet border guards, both human and non-human. Perhaps the most original memorial of this kind, in Lehedzyne, Cherkasy region, commemorates a group of up to 150 border patrol dogs reported to have participated in an attack on a group of German soldiers during the Second World War.[17] Much more frequently, commemorative markers for border guards, often in the form of border poles or maps, have been added to existing Great Patriotic War memorials or installed in separate locations. Most of these date from the period between the late 1990s and early 2010s, responding to an initial post-Soviet period of self-consciousness about the country's new borders and their defenders. Many of these memorials reference border guards "of all generations," privileging corporate identification over the divide between Soviet and post-Soviet members of the service and catering to a need for continuity and pedigree. A similar wave of memorialization saw the erection of numerous memorials to police officers killed in the line of duty. Installed around the same time, in response to the ongoing

17 "Legedzino. Pamiatnik sobakam," *Kolokrai*, accessed June 20, 2023, https://kolokray.com/f/legedzino-pamyatnik-sobakam.html.

Figure 2.7. Monument to Members of Law Enforcement, Odesa, from 1997. Photo: Mischa Gabowitsch, April 2023.

Figure 2.8. Monument to female fighter pilots killed defending Kyiv from the German forces in 1941, funded by a company called Figaro Catering. Holosiivs'kyi National Natural Park on the outskirts of Kyiv. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, April 2023.

and often lethal battle against organized crime, they likewise reference policemen (though few if any women) from both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods (see figure 2.7).

Just as in other post-Soviet countries, monuments sponsored by private individuals and companies abound (see figure 2.8).[18]

Some new memorials received patronage from pro-Russian politicians, such as a 2013 monument in Kherson to Red Army supply truck drivers that was unveiled in the presence of Volodymyr Sal'do, the former mayor of Kherson who later collaborated with the Russian invaders.[19] However, new World

18 For the role of businessmen and individual politicians in sponsoring Bandera monuments in Western Ukraine, see Myshlovska, "The Sacralization of the Ukrainian Statehood," 268–69.

19 "V Khersone otkryli pamiatnik frontovym avtomobilistam," *Unian*, May 8,

War II monuments were also initiated by more mainstream politicians, sometimes to establish continuity between the Second World War and Ukraine's resistance against Russian aggression since 2014, and in line with the policy of extending commemoration from the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 to the entire Second World War starting in 1939, including the period of Soviet-German collaboration, and reconciling the memory of Ukrainian nationalist fighters with that of Red Army soldiers. Thus, in 2020, President Volodymyr Zelens'kyi initiated the construction of four commemorative bells to symbolize the memory of the fallen and reconciliation between the countries that fought in World War Two. These include a Bell of Victory in Uzhhorod in Transcarpathia (annexed to Soviet Ukraine in 1946), a Bell of Memory in Milove in a part of the Luhan'sk region then controlled by Ukraine, as well as plans for two more bells to be installed in Russian-occupied areas of the country after liberation: a Bell of Peace in Donets'k and a Bell of Unity in Simferopol'.[20]

Changes since 2014

A new wave of memorialization since 2014 saw the installation of numerous monuments and commemorative plaques to protesters killed during the Euromaidan protests (known as the Heavenly Hundred) and especially to Ukrainian soldiers killed in the 2014 Anti-Terrorist Operation in defense against Russia and pro-Russian separatists.[21] The initiators of ATO monuments have ranged from surviving relatives to Ukrainian nationalists aiming to create a cult of Ukrainian heroes and inscribing the ATO dead into a lineage of Ukrainian military exploits reaching back to the Middle Ages. The trident from Ukraine's coat of arms is the most ubiquitous symbol on such memorials and has also been added to some existing monuments honoring the dead of the Second World War and other

2013, https://www.unian.net/politics/785502-v-hersone-otkryili-pamyatnik-frontovyim-avtomobilistam.html.

20 "U merezhi pokazaly, yak pislia restavratsii vyhliadaie memorial 'Ukraina-vyzvolyteliam' u Milovomu," *RBK-Ukraïna*, November 16, 2021, https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/styler/seti-pokazali-restavratsii-vyglyadit-memorial-1637066135.html.

21 On the construction of ATO memorials in eastern and southern Ukraine, see Iryna Sklokina, "Vshanuvannia Nebesnoï Sotni ta zahyblykh v ATO," in *Polityka i pamiat': Dnipro—Zaporizhzhia—Odesa—Kharkiv vid 1990-kh do s'ohodni*, ed. Heorhii Kas'ianov [Georgiy Kasianov] (L'viv: FOP Shumylovych, 2018), 135–42.

conflicts and catastrophes. The historian and memory scholar Denys Shatalov has analyzed how the commemoration of the ongoing war in particular has "merged in space" and become entangled with that of the Second World War.[22]

Adding the names of fallen ATO participants to existing memorials is a common practice. Thus, in the village of Veletens'ke, Kherson region, the names of local residents who died in the Soviet-Afghan war and in the Anti-Terrorist Operation have been added to a list of those who died in the Great Patriotic War, at the request of the mother of a fallen ATO soldier. In Mykhailivka, also in the Kherson region, a similar list of the fallen of the Great Patriotic War has been replaced with two identically styled plaques listing the dead of both that war and the ATO, hauntingly leaving space for additional names to be added.[23] The result is similar to the type of war memorial most common in Germany and Austria, which indiscriminately lists the names of local residents who died as soldiers in the two world wars, except that in the Ukrainian case both conflicts retain honorable connotations as patriotic wars, with one of the conflicts ongoing and the number of victims growing manifold since the first wave of memorialization.

Much has been made of Soviet-era monuments being removed from Ukrainian public spaces after the Euromaidan protests, either spontaneously or following the decommunization laws of 2015.[24] This primarily concerned statues of Soviet leaders and other symbols of Soviet rule, and often saw monuments to the Heavenly Hundred, the dead of the ATO, or older wars important to Ukraine's politics of history erected in their stead or on their now-empty pedestals. However, existing war-related memorials were almost invariably exempt from this wave of iconoclasm.[25] In fact, numerous new monuments to the dead of the Second World War have been erected in Ukraine since independence, including in the years

22 Denys Shatalov, "Merging in Space: The Ongoing War and Previous Wars in Ukraine," *TRAFO—Blog for Transregional Research* (blog), January 17, 2023, https://trafo.hypotheses.org/44335.

23 From Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork and, for the Veletens'ke case, an interview with a local resident.

24 On these laws in general, see Lina Klymenko, "Cutting the Umbilical Cord: The Narrative of the National Past and Future in Ukrainian De-Communization Policy," in *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*, ed. Aleksandra Gliszczyńska-Grabias and Uladzislau Belavusau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 310–28.

25 Mischa Gabowitsch, "What Has Happened to Soviet War Memorials since 1989/91? An Overview," *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 7, no. 2 (2021): 185–222.

since 2014, and many old ones have been completely renovated and practically rebuilt in the process. Despite Russian claims to the contrary, these monuments commemorate not only Ukrainian nationalists who fought against the Soviet Union but also Red Army soldiers as well as civilians. Many of these were built in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, such as a memorial in Hola Prystan', Kherson region, opened in 1995 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

Thus, Second World War memorials remained the only element of Soviet heritage that Ukrainians largely continued to acknowledge as valuable after 2014. By that very token, they also became the focus of nostalgia for the Soviet Union and Russian propaganda.[26] This in turn made them obvious targets for a new wave of iconoclasm following the large-scale invasion, discussed in chapter 6.

In the parts of Ukraine that Russia occupied in 2014—Crimea and parts of the Donets'k and Luhans'k region—the focus in 2014–2022 was on maintaining and renovating existing Great Patriotic War memorials as well as other Soviet statuary, including the Lenin statues that disappeared from public space in the rest of Ukraine. In addition, the Russian-installed authorities there commissioned a number of memorials commemorating soldiers and civilians who had died in the war against Ukraine. They also unveiled monuments honoring local separatist leaders and vilifying Ukrainian politicians. These included several monuments to Oleksandr Zakharchenko, head of the self-proclaimed Donets'k People's Republic, starting with a bust in Donets'k unveiled in 2019, on the first anniversary of his death in a bomb explosion.[27] The same year, an "Order of Judas" for Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko was installed south of Donets'k. Reportedly cast from shells fired at places in the Russian-held territory, it echoed a similar medal that Russian tsar Peter I had cast for his erstwhile ally Ivan Mazepa after the Ukrainian hetman (military leader) allied himself with Sweden against Russia in 1709.[28]

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26 For these observations, we are indebted to Iryna Sklokina (e-mail communication, August 21, 2018).

27 "Zakharchenko vozdvigli pamiatnik," *Lenta.ru*, August 31, 2019, https://lenta.ru/news/2019/08/31/pamyatnik.

28 "'Orden Iudy' dlia Poroshenko ustanovlen v meste postoiannogo eksponirovaniia vblizi KPP 'Elenovka,'" *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, April 2, 2019, https://dan-news.ru/politics/orden-iudy-dlya-poroshenko-ustanovlen-v-meste-postoyannogo-eksponirovaniya-vblizi-kpp-elenovka/.

Ukrainian memory politics

Our account so far has deliberately focused on Ukraine's actual monumentscape instead of engaging in generalizations about memory politics. Now is the time to provide a brief overview of this more abstract field. Our aim here is not to offer an exhaustive summary of the mnemonic controversies that have boiled over time and again in the public sphere of post-Soviet Ukraine. We simply wish to indicate some of the main lines along which the conflicts are usually presented, and point out how attention to monuments on the ground complicates the picture.

Georgiy Kasianov has argued that the politics of history in Ukraine since the late 1980s has been dominated by a struggle between two narratives.[29] The Ukrainian nationalist narrative assumes a long historical continuity of the ethnic Ukrainian nation and of the struggle for its independence against foreign oppression. By contrast, the nostalgic Soviet Ukrainian narrative emphasizes Ukrainian contributions to a common Soviet history, with a particular focus on the Great Patriotic War. Though not exclusively tied to particular regions, starting in the early post-Soviet period the nationalist narrative was dominant in Western Ukraine, especially Galicia, where it underpinned the removal of some Soviet monuments in the early 1990s, while the Soviet nostalgic one was hegemonic in Eastern Ukraine, Crimea, and large parts of the south-east. Both narratives co-existed in the national public sphere, despite their mutual contradictions, until the mid-2000s, largely because the central government under President Leonid Kuchma sought to keep aloof from the controversies and play both sides. Viktor Yushchenko, who came to power as a result of the Orange Revolution of 2004, championed a more active role for the state in memory politics. The president and parliament issued a large number of memory laws and decrees, and a Ukrainian Institute of National Memory was created, following the example of Poland. Yushchenko's main focus was on the memory of the Holodomor terror-famine of 1932–33, and it involved a territorially more extensive but still very circumscribed decommunization that largely consisted in removing some mon-

29 Our account in this section largely follows Georgiy Kasianov. See Heorhii Kas'ianov [Georgiy Kasianov], *Past Continuous: Istorychna polityka 1980-kh–2000-kh. Ukraïna ta susidy* (Kyiv: Laurus; Antropos-Logos-Fil'm, 2018) and the revised and updated English version: Georgiy Kasianov, *Memory Crash: The Politics of History in and around Ukraine, 1980s–2010s* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2022).

uments to Soviet leaders deemed responsible for the Holodomor. During the same period, Ukrainian ethnonationalist discourse and symbols made inroads into central and eastern Ukraine; marches in honor of the OUN and UPA became regular events beyond the western regions. The president undertook a number of initiatives to rehabilitate them as liberation and independence movements, culminating in the posthumous award of the title of Hero of Ukraine to Stepan Bandera in 2010. This drew fierce opposition from politicians espousing the Soviet-nostalgic narrative, which regards World War II-era Ukrainian nationalist fighters as traitors and criminals. In particular, the Party of Regions, based in south-eastern Ukraine and linked to the industrialist and mafia grouping known as the Donets'k Clan, took up a pro-Russian, anti-nationalist, and Soviet nostalgic rhetoric as a means to combat Yushchenko and his associates, resulting in the creation of a number of new monuments that fit this discourse. Once the party's leader, Viktor Yanukovych, came to power in 2010, he attempted in turn to spread the Soviet nostalgic narrative to Western Ukraine. Public controversies between exponents of the two views escalated, leading to mutual accusations of fascism and Soviet imperialism and occasional clashes.

The Revolution of Dignity of 2014 and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea and military intervention in the Donbas region led to a new and much more extensive wave of decommunization. Four wide-ranging and controversial decommunization laws stipulated, among other things, opening and restructuring Soviet-era archives, providing honors and benefits to surviving members of the OUN and UPA, and removing a number of communist symbols and monuments from public spaces. Regarding monuments, the laws thereby turned into official policy the "Leninfall" that activists had already started carrying out without official sanction. Ukrainian nationalist activists' intense involvement in memory politics was, among other things, a way to compensate for their electoral weakness.

This brief overview glosses over a number of topics that have been important to mnemonic debates in post-Soviet Ukraine, such as the Ukrainian-Polish controversies, focusing in particular on the Volyn' massacres of Polish civilians by Ukrainian nationalists in the summer of 1943 and attempts at Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation.[30] It also leaves out other

30 See, for example, Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Memory Wars and Reconciliation in the Ukrainian–Polish Borderlands: Geopolitics of Memory from a Local Perspective," in *History,*

themes that have been pushed to the sidelines by the central mnemonic conflicts, including the memory of the Holocaust of the Jews and Roma and the deportation of the Crimean Tatars in May 1944.[31] What matters to us here, however, is not to paint a comprehensive picture, but to point out that the treatment of monuments in Ukraine, including war memorials, has often been read through the prism of such national-level controversies. A frequent assumption is that monuments, including memorials to, for example, Red Army soldiers or UPA fighters, must be read primarily as contributions to nationwide memory battles. As our account in the first part of this chapter should have made clear, the reality on the ground is often much more complex and structured by local dynamics at least as much as by national debates. This is all the more true of changes in rural Ukraine.

Recent changes in rural Ukraine

Grand narratives about the monumentscape in Ukraine, or in other post-Soviet countries for that matter, tend to focus on big cities, ignoring rural areas. Yet these latter areas are particularly important to our story: not only is the vast majority of war memorials in Ukraine located in villages, small towns, and in the rural outskirts of big cities, they have also been subject to even more substantial modifications than centrally located monuments in regional capitals and other large urban areas. In addition, changes in Ukrainian monuments policies often start in rural areas: thus, for example, memorialization of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in

Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games, ed. Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 173–92; Georges Mink, "Laying the Groundwork for Reconciliation," *New Eastern Europe*, no. 01 (25) (2017): 116–23; Andrii Portnov, *Poland and Ukraine: Entangled Histories, Asymmetric Memories* (Berlin: Forum Transregionale Studien, 2020).

31 On Holocaust memory, see John-Paul Himka, "The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-Communist Ukraine," in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-communist Europe*, ed. John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic (Lincoln, NB; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 626–61; Andrii Portnov, "The Holocaust in the Public Discourse of Post-Soviet Ukraine," in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, ed. Julie Fedor et al. (Cham: Palgrave, 2017), 347–70. On the memory of the deportation of the Crimean Tatars, see Elmira Muratova, "The Crimean Tatars' Memory of Deportation and Islam," in *Memory and Religion from a Postsecular Perspective*, ed. Zuzanna Bogumił and Yuliya Yurchuk (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), 267–83.

Western Ukraine began in villages in the 1990s and only moved to the cities several years later.[32]

As most of the territory occupied by Russia in 2022 was rural, many of the changes discussed in this book concern memorials located outside of big cities, sometimes drawing on modifications already underway in the pre-occupation period. Not limited to the above-discussed expansion of the memorial canon through the addition of new monuments, changes to Great Patriotic War memorials also affected the existing monuments themselves: the sculptures, steles, pedestals, lists of soldiers' names, plaques with dedications, fences, and other elements.

Whoever turns off a main road into any Ukrainian village will invariably encounter a Great Patriotic War memorial. While there could be surprising stylistic variation in rural war memorials in the late Soviet era, in many cases this will be a stereotypical sculpture of a soldier or grieving mother. Yet these standard-issue statues will often have been painted in multiple colors or had portraits with names, religious symbols, or symbols of Ukrainian statehood attached to them. They might also bear the traces of folk rituals or display other modifications not envisaged by the original sculptor and architect and not (at least initially) sanctioned by any official canon. During our fieldwork in different parts of Ukraine between 2018 and 2023, we very rarely encountered an unmodified Great Patriotic War memorial in a village or small town.

Overall one can identify several types of modifications that occur both in isolation and in combination.

The first type is polychromy (see figures 2.9-2.18). In the Soviet period, most war memorials in small localities were made of (sometimes reinforced) concrete, plaster, or bricks. They were originally a natural gray color or were whitewashed; sometimes they were given a coat of silver, gold, or dark, patina-colored paint. In any case, they were monochrome. This tradition remained in place until the first decade of the twenty-first century. In recent years, however, memorials have often become multi-colored. Elements of statues put in relief through the use of a separate color can include banners, weapons, wreaths, bits of clothing (capes, boots, belts, headgear, or buttons), rank insignia (ensigns, shoulder marks, buttons) and decorations, and a figure's hair or eyes. Other parts of memorials have also sometimes been painted in different colors, including five-

32 Yurchuk, "Reordering of Meaningful Worlds," 108.

Figure 2.9. Great Patriotic War memorial in Volnovakha, Donets'k region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2020.

pointed stars, decorative urns, medals, flowers or wreaths, letters, or other protruding elements. Some monuments are entirely covered in paint of five to seven different colors, creating a color scheme reminiscent of comic books, lawn ornaments, or ceramic figurines or toys.[33] A related set of vernacular practices of adding color takes up the eternal flame motif, imitating a flame in the absence of gas, for example through the use of candles in red glass holders or flame-shaped sheets of red or orange paper or plastic.[34] Still other practices go beyond commemoration. Thus, in Bilozerka in the Kherson region, young women regularly wrapped colored ribbons around the barrel of a Great Patriotic War self-propelled artillery vehicle monument when seeing their boyfriends off to army duty.

The second type of modification is through the addition of Ukrainian national symbols. Sometimes this is also done through polychrome painting, when the pedestal or other elements of a monument are painted in the

33 Nikolai Gomaniuk [Mykola Homanyuk], "Pamiatnik neizvestnomu bogu," *ShOIZDAT*, May 31, 2020, https://shoizdat.com/pamyatnik-neizvestnomu-bogu/; Mykola Homanyuk, "The Transformation of Peripheral Memory Spaces in Modern Ukraine. Presentation at the Interdisciplinary Online Conference 'Black Sea Region in the Times of Crises: New Theoretical Approaches and Research Methodologies,' October–December 2021," Youtube video, 16:33, February 9, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4wBtZGlxNY. For a discussion of comparable practices in rural Russia, where cemetery fences are usually painted light blue because blue paint is the most easily available, see S.V. Mokhov, "Pochemu ogrady kladbishch krasiat v goluboi tsvet," *Zhivaia starina*, no. 2 (2014): 50–52.

34 Mykola Homanyuk has encountered numerous examples of such practices in his fieldwork in Ukraine, while Mischa Gabowitsch has observed similar practices in Russia as well as at Soviet war memorials outside the former USSR. For documentation of a Russian case, see "Russian 'Eternal Flame' Replaced by Cardboard Painting," *BBC News*, April 29, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-36170117.

blue-and-yellow colors of Ukraine's flag. At other times it involves adding a trident, a flagpole with the Ukrainian flag (or even the black-and-red flag of the 1940s Ukrainian Insurgent Army), changing the inscription (from

Figure 2.10 (top left). Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Kruhloozerka, Kherson region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, July 2017.

Figure 2.11 (bottom left). Great Patriotic War memorial in Znam'ianka, Kirovohrad region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2020.

Figure 2.12 (bottom right). Great Patriotic War memorial in the Andriïvka municipality, Zhytomyr region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2023.

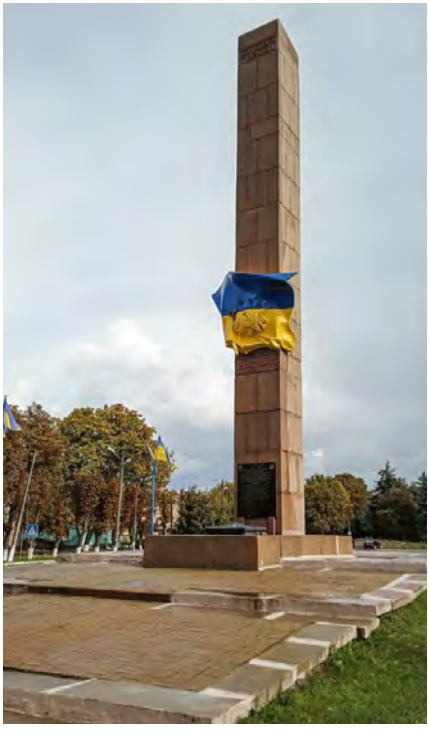

Figure 2.13 (top left). Great Patriotic War memorial in Bezliudivka, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2020.

Figure 2.14 (top right). Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Doroshivka, Mykolaïv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2021.

Figure 2.15 (bottom). Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Topol's'ke, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2020.

Figures 2.16, 2.17, 2.18. Evolution of polychromy. Great Patriotic War memorial on route M-14 between Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, and Kherson. Photos: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2019, May 2021, September 2022.

Figure 2.19. A remembrance poppy with the dates "1939–1945" attached to a Soviet-era Great Patriotic War memorial in lieu of an older symbol. Hoshcha, Rivne region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, July 2023.

Russian to Ukrainian), removing Soviet language (see figures 2.20, 2.21), or by adding soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces to the list of those commemorated. Other frequent modifications reflect post-Euromaidan changes in the symbolic representation of World War II in Ukraine that are widely seen as representing a turn away from the Soviet canon of war memory toward a more European culture of remembrance. Thus, local residents change the dates displayed from 1941–45 (the dates of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet tradition, starting with Hitler's attack on the USSR but bracketing out the earlier period of Nazi-Soviet collaboration) to 1939–45 (the dates of the Second World War in Europe). They also install remembrance poppies—a commemorative symbol for World War II introduced in Ukraine in 2014, inspired by the British remembrance poppy for World War I (see figure 2.19).

The third type of modification involves adding (almost exclusively Christian) religious symbols.[35] In most cases, this is an East Slavic suppadaneum cross representing the Orthodox Christian faith, but sometimes it is a Latin cross, which does not necessarily stand for a specific

35 For observations about similar practices in Moldova, see Ludmila Cojocari, "Political Liturgies and Concurrent Memories in the Context of Nation-Building Process in Post-Soviet Moldova: The Case of 'Victory Day,'" *Interstitio: East European Review of Historical Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2007): 110.

Figure 2.20. Great Patriotic War memorial in Turiis'k, Volyn' region. A cross has been added to the memorial, and the word "socialist" has been removed from the inscription "To those who fell for our socialist motherland." Note the stork nest atop the obelisk. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2023.

Figure 2.21. Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Stoianiv, L'viv region. The word "Soviet" has been chiseled out of the inscription "Your fellow villagers are eternally grateful to you who fell for the Soviet fatherland." A Latin cross has been added, but the red star on the soldier's helmet remains unchanged. Photo: Mischa Gabowitsch, August 2018.

confession (see figures 2.20, 2.21). Other Christian symbols include statues of angels.[36] In addition, sometimes icons or candleholders are affixed to memorials (see figure 2.22). In Ukraine as in Moldova, Belarus, and Russia, we have often encountered traces of folk commemorative rituals: candy, fruit, and the gingerbread used as part of church memorial services; memorial candles; and bottles of liquor (both full and broached) and

36 Lehr and Aponiuk, "Memory, Myth and Monuments," 220.

Figure 2.22. A granite icon attached to a Great Patriotic War memorial in Kyrylivka, Zaporizhzhia region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2021.

Figure 2.23. Small bags of sprouted wheat, a traditional Easter decoration, at the Memorial to All the Innocent Who Died or Were Murdered (victims of the Holodomor of 1932–1933, the Stalinist repressions of 1932–1953, and the war of 1941–1945). Novoromanivs'k municipality, Zhytomyr region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2023.

Figure 2.24. Candy at a Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Bratoliubivka, Kirovohrad region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2023.

glasses (see figures 2.23, 2.24, 2.25). The Orthodox Church does not condone the consumption of alcohol during memorial services, but drinking "to the repose of the soul" is a common practice in Ukraine, similar once again to the neighboring post-Soviet countries.

The fourth type of modification involves private initiatives to (additionally) individualize or personalize memorials (see figure 2.27).[37] In most cases, rural war memorials list the names of soldiers who died in or near the locality and/or war participants from the area. High-ranking officers or specially decorated soldiers (such

37 On the distinction between individualization and personalization, see Anthony King, "The Afghan War and 'Post-modern' Memory: Commemoration and the Dead of Helmand," *The British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 1 (2010): 1–25; Mischa Gabowitsch, "Umkämpfte Tote: Gefallene Soldaten, Angehörige und der Staat," *Mittelweg 36*, April 2014, 47–53.

Figure 2.25 (top left). Wreaths and a bottle of piña colada at a memorial to prisoners of war killed by the Nazis in 1943 on the railway section Kharkiv-Pokotylivka near the village of Pylypivka, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2020.

Figure 2.26 (top right). Memorial to the 193rd and 195th Rifle Divisions and the 9th, 19th, and 22nd Motor Corps. Route E-40 near the village of Andriïvka, Zhytomyr region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2023.

Figure 2.27 (bottom). A portrait of a fallen soldier attached to the pedestal of a Soviet-era Great Patriotic War memorial in Hannivka, Dnipropetrovs'k region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, September 2021.

as Heroes of the Soviet Union) are often singled out, but otherwise these are standardized lists of last names in alphabetical order, often including only the initials for the first name and patronymic. Recent modifications involve, for example, adding more details about a specific person to an existing memorial by adding a printed, photoceramic, or bas-relief portrait with additional information, such as the full first name and patronymic, life dates, or other biographical information. Sometimes individual names are singled out within the existing lists using paint, and new names are added, often using makeshift methods such as scratching.

The fifth type of modification is what could be called material domestication. During the Soviet period, one feature of war memorials was that they were often built from materials not available to ordinary people: natural stone cladding, reinforced concrete walkway slabs, cast-iron fencing. None of this could be bought in stores. They were available only to state enterprises. The use of such materials served as an additional marker of public objects, visually distinguishing them from private ones.

Under market conditions, all construction materials became widely available. Thus, when renovating or rebuilding war memorials in Ukraine, especially those in rural areas (which tend to be made cheaply and thus in frequent need of repair), local residents started using the same materials as those used in home repair. Thus, one can often encounter pedestals covered with ordinary kitchen tiles or plastic clapboard or surrounded by the kind of reinforced concrete fence used for private gardens (see figures 2.15, 2.26, 2.27). The use of such materials desacralizes and domesticates the monuments. It is hard to ponder the sublime while standing on the kinds of tiles you have in your own bathroom.

In addition, in decommunizing or de-Russifying monuments in Ukraine, people often replace Russian-language plaques with dedications or lists of the dead with Ukrainian-language ones. Whereas the old plaques were typically made from stone or metal, the new ones are often made from hard plastic or plastic film and printed at the same shops that also produce shop signs or commercial ads. This also changes the effect on visitors, turning the memorial profane and stripping it of its sacral aura.

These modifications of war memorials have inscribed them into broader popular commemorative traditions. All these types of transformations, with the partial exception of the second type, are reminiscent of how Ukrainians care for family graves. *Radonitsia* or *Provody* (known as *Hrobtsy* or *Hrobky* in some parts of Ukraine), the Orthodox day of remem-

bering (all) the dead, technically falls on the Tuesday nine days after Easter Sunday, but is very commonly observed two days early, on Sunday. Our fieldwork suggests that this is the most popular commemorative occasion in Ukraine, roughly equivalent to All Saints' Day in Poland or the Day of the Dead in Mexico in early November. Even large Ukrainian cities can look empty on this day as many Ukrainians visit cemeteries. Orthodox Easter usually falls between April 4 and May 6. One or two weeks prior to Radonitsia, Ukrainians tend to take care of the graves of family members: painting, whitewashing, pulling weeds, sweeping, placing wreaths, etc.[38]

During the same season, war memorials are given the same treatment in preparation for Victory Day. They have thus been inscribed into a broader tradition of commemorating the dead, just as Soviet proponents of "new secular rituals" had intended in the 1950s and 1960s.[39] Far from being associated merely with religious and folk custom, the practices we have described are now also seen as part of the Soviet and post-Soviet tradition of *blahoustrii* (in Ukrainian)/*blagoustroistvo* (in Russian)—maintenance and beautification. In Western countries, care of monuments is typically the purview of dedicated municipal or other government agencies. In the Soviet Union, semi-voluntary popular involvement was crucial. Especially before holidays such as Victory Day (May 9) or local liberation days, local residents were expected to embellish war memorials by cleaning and mending them, clearing the area around them from debris and rubbish, and planting new flowers. Beginning as patriotic reeducation and mobilization exercises in the formerly occupied areas, these practices spread unionwide in the Brezhnev era. Rather than being policed directly by state or military agencies, these beautification exercises were increasingly associated with local enterprises and especially schools. Thus, individual schools would declare their patronage over a specific local memorial, and pupils were henceforth expected to help maintain it. Given the sheer number of Great Patriotic War memorials in particular and the rudimentary materials from which they were often made, maintenance by municipal services without such popular involvement would have been challenging anywhere in the former Soviet Union and continues to be

38 In Moldova, Liudmila Cojocari has observed a similar fusion of Orthodox Christian commemorative traditions and practices associated with May 9: Cojocari, "Political Liturgies and Concurrent Memories," 110.

39 Gabowitsch, "Victory Day before the Cult."

across post-Soviet space. Thus, these practices have continued in many post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine, though with considerable variation between regions and even individual localities, often depending on the initiative and dedication of local teachers and other volunteers.

Similar variation can be detected in the extent to which monuments have continued to act as focal points of more traditional ceremonies of war commemoration. Rituals on and around Victory Day (May 9), the Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation (May 8), newly established in 2015, and other commemorative dates such as the Day of Remembrance and Sorrow (June 22, commemorating the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union) or local liberation days have featured a variety of practices covering a spectrum from rituals and symbols deliberately created to de-Sovietize commemoration (for example, the poppy as a commemorative symbol) to those imported from Russia, such as Immortal Regiment processions with portraits of relatives who participated in the war.[40] In all of these cases, Soviet-era monuments have remained central to commemoration. Memorials have also seen the reburial of bodies of soldiers newly unearthed by *poshukivtsi* (volunteer searchers) or found during construction work. Even after the Russian attack of 2014, searchers continued to collaborate across national borders, for example, by exchanging bodies so soldiers could be buried in their home regions (see figure 2.28).

A news feature about a reburial ceremony in the village of Velyka Bilozerka, Zaporizhzhia region, may serve as an example. The video documents a typical hybrid event. The date (May 8) is based on Ukraine's new, post-2014 commemorative calendar. Participants hold Ukrainian symbols (the national flag and the poppy), but also portraits of individual soldiers in a manner reminiscent of the Russian-initiated Immortal Regiment. The speeches are in Ukrainian, while the inscriptions shown are also in Russian. The journalist notes the presence of Armenians and soldiers' relatives from Saint Petersburg and interviews one of the latter (in Russian) as well as a local searcher (in Ukrainian), who mentions cooperation with colleagues in (Russian-occupied) Sevastopol' and Russia.[41]

40 Jochen Hellbeck, Tetiana Pastushenko, and Dmytro Tytarenko, "'Wir werden siegen, wie schon vor 70 Jahren unsere Großväter gesiegt haben': Weltkriegsgedenken in der Ukraine im Schatten des neuerlichen Kriegs," in *Kriegsgedenken als Event: Der 9. Mai 2015 im postsozialistischen Europa*, ed. Cordula Gdaniec, Mischa Gabowitsch, and Ekaterina Makhotina (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2017), 41–66.

41 Podiia dnia vid ENTS, "U Velykii Bilozirtsi perepokhovaly 37 biitsiv Druhoï Svitovoï," Youtube video, 8:30, May 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FTLK9L4uiA.

Figure 2.28. The tomb of Lieutenant Ivan Chmil', buried in 2017 at a Soviet war memorial in the village of Tarasivka, Kyiv region, after his body was brought from the Leningrad region in Russia. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, February 2023.

As a result of all these developments, war memorials have acquired new meanings: they have been affected by the general evolution of commemorative practices and are often personalized or even domesticated. Over the past decade, war memorials in peripheral parts of Ukraine have turned from venues for hero worship to sites of mournful commemoration, in what can be described as a process of grassroots decommunization. In the absence of any top-down authority policing ways of interacting with monuments, this happened quite naturally, and as we shall see in chapter 6, it was one of the reasons why, even as other monuments seen as Soviet or Russian were toppled, no systematic "soldierfall" occurred in Ukraine in 2022–23 on the model of the post-2014 removal of ideological statuary known as the Leninfall, with the single exception of the L'viv region.[42]

Conclusion

War memorials are thus ubiquitous in Ukraine and retain a symbolic importance that is constantly renewed by entanglements between new and old forms and themes of commemoration. At the same time, it is important to note that such memorials do not necessarily constitute important elements of residents' everyday experiences. Mykola Homanyuk's systematic study of mental maps in two towns in the Kherson region in 2020 revealed that, for example, local branches of the ATB-Market chain of discount supermarkets are much more significant landmarks. War memo-

42 Iryna Sklokina, "World War II Monuments in Ukraine: Protection, Dismantling, Reuse in 2022–2023," *Kunsttexte*, no. 1 (2024).

rials are often less central reference points than other monuments.[43] In many places, they only attract more sustained attention on commemorative occasions—though, as will be seen later in this book, such occasions are particularly varied and frequent in Ukraine, as in some other post-Soviet countries.

Overall, the areas newly occupied by the Russian military in 2022 were among those parts of Ukraine where monuments to Red Army soldiers were treated with the greatest reverence and most clearly continued to shape the commemorative landscape even after decommunization, as evident to any visitor and amply documented by photos and videos in local news media.

In the parts of Ukraine that came under Russian control since 2014—Crimea and the occupied parts of the Luhans'k and Donet'sk regions—Russian forces and their local allies immediately started using war memorials to draw lines of continuity between the struggle against German invaders and that against Ukrainian rule. Several memorials damaged by the fighting in the Donets'k and Luhans'k regions became symbols of the new war, with photos circulating in Ukraine, Russia, and internationally.[44] The most important of these was the memorial at Savur-Mohyla, discussed in chapter 4.

In the occupied territories, ceremonies on traditional occasions of Great Patriotic War commemoration as well as new dates in honor of the dead of 2014 now served primarily to justify separating these territories from Ukraine. Plaques and other memorial markers were added to existing monuments to draw lines of continuity between the heroes and victims of the Second World War and those of the ongoing conflict.[45] Renovating memorials damaged during the fighting in 2014 served the same purpose.

43 Mykola Homanyuk, "Zvit za rezul'tatamy sotsiolohichnoho doslidzhennia v misti Skadovs'k: 'Iak skadovchany spryimaiut', rozumiiut' ta uiavliaiut' svoie misto' (unpublished research report)," 2020; Mykola Homanyuk, "Zvit za rezul'tatamy sotsiolohichnoho doslidzhennia v misti Heniches'k: 'Iak henichany spryimaiut', rozumiiut' ta uiavliaiut' svoie misto'" (unpublished research report, 2020).

44 Thus, an image of a damaged memorial in Zaitseve, Donbas region, featuring the heads of soldiers from the Civil War and the Great Patriotic War, made it onto the cover of an English-language book: Paul J. D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, Revised edition (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

45 Hellbeck, Pastushenko, and Tytarenko, "Wir werden siegen."

Chapter 3
Monuments Destroyed, Spared, and Stolen

Monuments destroyed: War memorials demolished, damaged, or removed by Russian forces

As it advanced into Ukraine, the invading Russian military destroyed a number of war memorials, both deliberately and unintentionally. Some of the accidental damage was widely reported in the Ukrainian and international media. On March 1, 2022, the building of a planned museum at the Babyn Iar memorial site in Kyiv was damaged during Russian shelling of a nearby television tower. Babyn Iar, the site of one of the deadliest Nazi massacres of Jews and Roma, had been at the center of a protracted international controversy about a future memorial complex.[1] A menorah-shaped Holocaust memorial at the Drobyts'ky Iar execution site outside Kharkiv was likewise damaged by a Russian missile on March 26. Two days earlier, Russian artillery fire had hit Kharkiv's largest memorial to the Great Patriotic War, the Memorial of Glory.[2] In Bucha, near Kyiv, Russian tanks shelled a Soviet-era armored vehicle installed on a pedestal as a memorial to the Soviet-Afghan war, mistaking it for a Ukrainian

1 On the controversy, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "Savior on the Blood, or Ilya Khrzhanovsky's Babyn Yar Experimental Museum," *Krytyka*, April 2020, https://krytyka.com/en/articles/savior-blood-or-ilya-khrzhanovskys-babyn-yar-experimental-museum; PoSoCoMeS, "Babyn Yar Memory Today: Puzzles and Troubles. PoSoCoMeS Roundtable," Youtube video, 1:30:22, September 30, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3rdjMAl_NM, especially the contribution by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

2 Kharkiv novyny, "Khar'kov 24 marta: Memorial Slavy obstreliali rossiiskie okkupanty," Youtube video, 0:56, March 24, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65clMVd5_z4; "Terekhov: povrezhdeniia ot rossiiskikh 'gradov' dolzhny ostat'sia na Memoriale slavy kak simvol nashei bor'by s sovremennym natsizmom," *Interfax-Ukraina*, May 5, 2022, https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/829957.html and Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

Figure 3.1. Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Shevchenkove, Mykolaïv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, January 2023.

Figure 3.2. Great Patriotic War Memorial in Husarivka, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, July 2023.

tank.[3] In the Donets'k region and in Hostomel' near Kyiv, Russian shelling damaged several memorials to the Great Patriotic War, including at least one communal grave of Red Army soldiers.[4]

There was a specific reason why some war memorials were particularly exposed to such accidental damage. During the Second World War, some of the heaviest fighting was for high ground near important roads, as well

3 Teleradiostudiia MO Ukraïny Bryz, "V Buchi okupant vstupyv v bii z pam'iatnykom afhantsiam)))," Facebook video, 0:21, May 16, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1020827048839677.

4 "Pam'iatky Druhoï svitovoï viiny poshkodyly rosiiany na Donechchyni—zokrema brats'ki mohyly," *Dom*, March 21, 2022, https://kanaldom.tv/uk/pamyatky-drugoyi-svitovoyi-vijny-poshkodyly-rosiyany-na-donechchyni-zokrema-bratski-mogyly-foto/; Vladislav Musienko, "Monument to Soldiers Killed in World War II Damaged in Gostomel as a Result of Explosions and Shelling by Occupiers," *UNIAN Photobank*, April 6, 2022, https://photo.unian.info/photo/1131351-povrezhdennyy-v-rezultate-vzryvov-i-obstrelov-okupantov-pamyatnik-pogibshim-voinam-v-gody-vtoroy-mirovoy-voyny-v-gostomele.

Figure 3.3. Trenches at a Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Teklyne, Cherkasy region. The memorial is located on a hilltop by route N1 Kyiv-Znamenka. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, September 2022.

Figure 3.4. Warning sign near a Great Patriotic War memorial in the village of Nova Husarivka, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, July 2023.

as for bridges and fords. Some of the most conspicuous memorials were later erected, often on elevations, to mark the sites of those battles. In the Russian invasion, these places often once again became important targets, leaving the monuments destroyed or damaged. The most prominent example in the early stages of the war was the hill of Savur-Mohyla, discussed in the next chapter. In 2022, the most iconic war memorial to suffer a similar fate was the huge Attack monument, located on Kremenets' hill, the highest point of Kharkiv region. Built in 1988, the monument was damaged during the Russian attack on nearby Izium in March 2022. (Other locations marked with Second World War memorials were fortified by Ukraine in preparation for the Russian onslaught, such as the hilltop memorial near Borshchiv in the Kyiv region, which commemorates the soldiers who died there encircled by German troops in August-September 1941.)

While such unintentional damage was not uncommon, the number of monuments the Russian forces deliberately destroyed on occupied territories for symbolic reasons was significantly higher. So was the variety of Russian agencies involved: whereas the army was in charge of cap-

Figure 3.5. An armored vehicle removing the Ukrainian coat of arms from a memorial to the Heroes of Independent Ukraine in Kherson. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *Kherson: voina bez feikov*, May 22, 2022, t.me/kherson_non_fake/1161.

turing territory and then tended to garrison in the larger cities, the main branches engaged in policing occupied areas, including smaller towns and villages, were the National Guard (*Rosgvardiia*) and military police. They were also the main Russian groups interacting with monuments.

Violence against symbols of Ukrainian identity occurred "possibly also as a substitute for military victories"[5] and was therefore all the more ostentatious. Rather than tacitly de-Ukrainianizing public spaces, the Russian forces often made a show out of removing symbols, staging performances in support of a narrative of liberation from nationalist rule. In late May 2022, a feature on the Russian TV channel *Zvezda* showed a scene, set to uplifting music, of workers removing the Ukrainian coat of arms from an unidentified building. The speaker declared that locals were "getting rid of alien and criminal Ukrainian symbols."[6]

5 See Dario Gamboni's interpretation of the destruction of the Colonne Vendôme by the Paris Commune: Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 40.

6 While the report is about Nova Ialta, Donets'k region, the building is actually the municipal council of Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region. Georgii Mamsurov, "Put' k miru: kak seichas zhivut Zaporozhskaia i Khersonskaia oblasti Ukrainy," *TRK Zvezda Novosti*, May 29, 2022, https://tvzvezda.ru/news/20225291947-8lpDq.html, 0:40. For further examples of montages showing the removal of Ukrainian symbols from administrative buildings in Zaporizhzhia region, see https://t.me/v_and_z/355, April 21, 2022; https://t.me/mihnovosti/57z, May 8, 2022.

Monuments were among the main symbols singled out for demolition or de-Ukrainianization. One video that circulated widely on pro-Russian Telegram channels showed the destruction of an ATO monument in Kherson—a flagpole with a Ukrainian flag, granite plaques, trident, and candle installed on the pedestal of a former statue of Bolshevik leader Sergo Ordzhonikidze. On May 17, a man who presented himself as a disgruntled former member of Ukraine's Territorial Defense had himself filmed blowing up the flagpole with explosives he claimed he had received from that organization, and tore up the flag.[7] Also in Kherson, Russian soldiers forced passersby at gunpoint to tear down portraits of ATO fighters from the Glory of Ukraine memorial complex; Russian propaganda then presented them as liberated residents, finally shaking off their fear of Ukrainian nationalists.[8]

The main targets were ATO monuments and plaques. In reporting on their destruction or removal, the Russian media made a point of challenging claims of continuity between Ukrainian war efforts in 1941–45 and since 2014 and avoiding the use of terms such as "anti-terrorist operation" used in Ukraine to refer to the conflict. Whenever possible, they mentioned Ukrainian nationalists' involvement in the creation of these monuments. One typical example are Celtic crosses added to Great Patriotic War memorials as part of the nationalist *Pamiat' natsiï* campaign, which were removed in places such as Lazurne, Kherson region (on April 23), and Manhush, Donets'k region (on May 7).[9] The Russian military also made a particular target of monuments displaying the red-and-black flag of the World War II-era Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). In Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region, soldiers on March 14 used an armored vehicle to ram one of the region's first monuments to ATO victims and burned the UPA

7 "Zhiteli Khersonskoi oblasti pri podderzhke VGA massovo demontiruiut ukrainskie flagi," *NewsFront*, May 15, 2022, https://news-front.info/2022/05/15/zhiteli-hersonskoj-oblasti-pri-podderzhke-vga-massovo-demontirujut-ukrainskie-flagi (no longer accessible in August 2024).

8 https://t.me/kherson_non_fake/694, April 11, 2022. The comment below the republished video regarding the forced character of the removal is corroborated by multiple interviews with local residents.

9 "V prigorode Mariupolia demontirovali pamiatnik getmanu Sagaidachnomu," *RIA Novosti*, May 7, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220507/pamyatnik-1787419621.html; "V osvobozhdennom Mangushe demontirovan odin iz simvolov ukrainskogo natsionalizma—kel'tskii krest," *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 7, 2022, https://dan-news.ru/obschestvo/v-osvobozhdennom-mangushe-demontirovan-odin-iz-simvolov-ukrainskogo-nacionalizma-2/?lang=ru; Mykola Homanyuk's interview with a resident of Lazurne.

flag hoisted above it, at first leaving the neighboring Ukrainian flag intact.[10] Monuments and plaques to individual ATO fighters were also destroyed. One prominent example was a memorial in Kherson to Ruslan Storcheus, a local policeman and commander of the *Kherson* volunteer battalion killed at Ilovais'k in 2014, located in a square named after him.[11]

Similar treatment was reserved for monuments to the Heavenly Hundred. In Skadovs'k, Kherson region, the plaque on a monument to the dead of the Revolution of Dignity (which also honored the fallen of the ATO) was torn out in mid-April; the next day, the entire monument was removed.[12]

In cases when control over a location shifted back and forth between the Russian and Ukrainian armies, one and the same monument could be targeted multiple times. Thus in Luhans'ke, Donets'k region, a cross-shaped monument to famous opera singer Vasyl' Slipak, who died there as a volunteer fighter in 2016, was toppled on March 7 after Russian forces first entered the village, then restored after the Ukrainian army retook Luhans'ke, and finally removed for good on July 10 following its renewed capture by the Russians.[13]

Plaques commemorating ATO fighters are typically installed on buildings where they went to school or college, but also on police stations and other places where the soldiers had worked. These are also among the buildings most frequently requisitioned by the occupying forces, who often swiftly destroyed the plaques.[14] In order to protect the plaques, school directors often had them removed for safekeeping as soon as the Russians arrived, or covered with black PE foil to shield them from view

10 https://t.me/energoatom_ua/3079, March 14, 2022.

11 https://t.me/hueviyherson/21991, July 12, 2022. See "Andrii Hordieiev: 'Nashchadky maiut' bachyty tsinu nashoï nezalezhnosti,'" Khersons'ka oblasna derzhavna administratsiia, August 24, 2017, https://khoda.gov.ua/andrij-gordeev%3A-«nashhadki-majut-bachiti-cinu-nashoï-nezalezhnosti» for a report about the opening of the memorial.

12 https://t.me/hueviyherson/17215, April 19, 2022; "Rosiis'ki zaharbnyky 'zvil'nyly' Skadovs'k vid pam'iatnoho znaku 'Zahyblym za iedynu Ukraïnu,'" *Most*, April 22, 2022, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20220423074817/https://most.ks.ua/news/type/1/url/rosijski_zagarbniki_zvilnili_skadovsk_vid_pamjatnogo_znaku_zagiblim_za_jedinu_ukrajinu; Mykola Homanyuk's interview with a local resident, April 2022.

13 https://t.me/andriyshTime/1769, July 10, 2022.

14 One example is a plaque to local policeman and ATO victim Roman Nabehov on the building of the police station in Oleshky, Kherson region. Source: Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork in Oleshky, April 2022.

Figure 3.6. Memorial plaque for Roman Nabehov on the building of school no. 50 in Kherson. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, July 2022.

and thus keep them from being destroyed (see figure 3.6).[15] In at least one case in Kherson (school no. 50), such a covering was placed not only on an ATO plaque but also on another one commemorating a soldier who died in the Soviet-Afghan War.[16]

Similar interventions appear to have occurred to preserve other memorials slated for removal. In Kherson's Park of Glory along the Dnipro River, a monument to local residents "who gave their lives in the struggle for peace and Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence" was installed in 2014 next to an eternal flame commemorating Great Patriotic War soldiers. On April 15, 2022, when the occupiers ordered the monument's stele removed, instead of dumping it in the Dnipro or breaking it into pieces, someone took it to the Old (Zabalkivs'ke) Cemetery located at a distance of 5 kilometers and placed it face down without damaging it.[17] In May, dried tulips could be seen lying on the stele, which had been turned over to make the inscription visible.[18] The stele may have been saved by municipal workers, or perhaps by ATO veterans, who Russian proxy administrator Kyrylo Stremousov claimed had taken down the monument in an act of repentance for their past involvement in anti-Russian fighting.[19]

15 Source: Mykola Homanyuk's interview with the director of a school in Oleshky, Kherson region, who mentioned that all school directors in the municipality issued orders to have such plaques removed for preservation. Other schools in the region also show signs of plaques having been carefully removed rather than ripped out and destroyed, such as the plaque to Oleksandr Raikhert on the building of the Kherson Hydro-Meteorological Technical School and city schools nos. 16 and 20 (Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork).

16 Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

17 https://t.me/hueviyherson/16938, April 14, 2022.

18 Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

19 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1169, April 21, 2022.

Other monuments targeted by the Russians included those built in recent years to commemorate figures, wars, or battles important to Ukrainian national history narratives about resistance against Russia, such as the seventeenth-century Cossack hetman (military leader) Petro Sahaidachnyi or the 1918 Battle of Kruty between the Ukrainian People's Republic and Soviet Russia. Thus, in Manhush, Donets'k region, a 2017 monument to Sahaidachnyi was dismantled with the dual justification that Sahaidachnyi had taken part in the siege of Moscow of 1618 on the Polish side, and that the statue had been erected with participation from Azov regiment fighters.[20] The statue was replaced with a Victory Banner. In Oleshky, Kherson region, a monument in the form of a giant trident was installed in 2018 on the pedestal of a toppled Lenin statue. Based on a design by a Kherson sculptor who was himself an ATO veteran, the monument honored "Heroes of Ukraine" who had supposedly died for the country's independence since the times of Grand Prince Iaroslav the Wise in the eleventh century. In June 2022, the occupation administration removed the trident.[21] In Mariupol', Donets'k region, the occupiers also dismantled a memorial to victims of the Holodomor famine.[22] Many more acts of removal of Holodomor memorials in the occupied parts of Kherson region followed in November 2023, just as the rest of Ukraine was commemorating the 90th anniversary of the famine.[23]

In at least one case, a Great Patriotic War memorial was singled out for destruction simply for featuring a Ukrainian-language inscription. In the village of Osokorivka, Kherson region, Russian soldiers appear to have shot bullets at a stele forming part of the local Great Patriotic War memorial that displayed a verse in Ukrainian.[24] Yet in many other cases such inscriptions were clearly not considered problematic; thus, on December 9,

20 "V prigorode Mariupolia."

21 "Na Khersonshchine vmesto pamiatnika Leninu ustanovili trizub," *depo Zaporozh'e*, June 6, 2018, https://zp.depo.ua/rus/zp/na-hersonschini-zamist-pam-yatnika-leninu-vstanovili-trizub-foto-20180606786052; "Na tsentral'noi ploshchadi goroda Alioshki v Khersonskoi oblasti demontirovali ukrainskii gerb," *TASS*, June 9, 2022, https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/14867437; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8211, June 9, 2022.

22 "Okupanty Mariupolia demontuvaly pam'iatnyk zhertvam holodomoru," *UA.NEWS*, October 19, 2022, https://ua.news/ua/war-vs-rf/okkupanty-mariupolya-demontirovali-pamyatnik-zhertvam-golodomora.

23 For examples, see Marharyta Dotsenko, "Na terytorii Ivanivs'koï hromady Khersonshchyny okupanty znyshchyly 14 pam'iatnykiv zhertvam Holodomoru," *Most*, November 24, 2023, https://most.ks.ua/news/url/na-teritoriji-ivanivskoji-gromadi-hersonschini-okupanti-znischili-14-pamjatnikiv-zhertvam-golodomoru/.

24 Source: personal communication and photographs by Andrii Selets'kyi.

a decoration ceremony and interviews with Russian soldiers were filmed and broadcast on propaganda channels in front of a 1957 monument in Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region, that bears a Ukrainian-language inscription honoring heroes of the Russian Civil War and the Great Patriotic War (see chapter 7).[25] Even in territories occupied since 2014, war memorials were not necessarily Russified, as evidenced by a memorial to victims of the Nazis on the outskirts of Luhans'k. Its large-scale inscription reads, in Ukrainian, "We shall not forget, we shall not forgive!" The memorial continues to feature prominently in reports about commemorative ceremonies since February 2022.[26]

In some cases, Ukrainian symbols were simply covered with Russian ones, as in the case of an ATO monument in front of the Oleshky, Kherson region, police station where the large trident was painted over with a Z symbol.[27] Elsewhere, Ukrainian symbols were removed from (Ukrainian-built) monuments to render them acceptable to the Russians. Thus, in Kherson, an obelisk honoring the Bolshevik *Iskra* newspaper was dismantled in 2015 and replaced in 2017 with a monument honoring "border guards of all generations."[28] On May 25, the occupiers removed the symbol of Ukraine's border guard agency and a plaque with the Ukrainian-language inscription "Border security is state power," then used the monument to celebrate Russia's own Border Guard Day three days later with a ceremony, flowers, and alcohol.[29]

In many cases, monument destruction or removal happened not at once but in stages. The initial invasion brought a first, somewhat unsystematic wave of iconoclasm, followed by more concerted efforts in April and early May 2022 in preparation for the Victory Day celebrations on May 9. Later destruction appears to have been more haphazard. One example is the ATO monument in Hola Prystan', Kherson region. It displayed portraits of eight local ATO victims on a large plaque attached to a granite

25 For a similar case in Skadovs'k, Kherson region, see https://t.me/tavriya_kherson/4087, February 22, 2023, 2:20.

26 "Luhanchane u memoryala 'Ne zabudem! Ne prostym' pochtyly pamiat' zhertv natsyzma," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, November 11, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/lugancane-u-memoriala-ne-zabudem-ne-prostim-poctili-pamat-zertv-nacizma.

27 Source: Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork in Oleshky, April 2022.

28 "U Khersoni vidkryly pamiatnyk 'Prykordonnykam usikh pokolin','" *Den'*, June 27, 2017, https://day.kyiv.ua/news/271221-u-khersoni-vidkryly-pamyatnyk-prykordonnykam-usikh-pokolin.

29 "Okupanty spapliuzhyly pamiatnyk ukraïns'kym prykordonnykam," *Holos Ukraïny*, May 26, 2022, http://www.golos.com.ua/article/360549; Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

stele that also featured a trident and an inscription honoring Heroes of Ukraine. Four of the portraits were torn down in May. In June, the plaque and trident were ripped out, the lining with the inscriptions destroyed, and the stele covered with the Z symbol and the slogan "For DNR LNR." In August, the defaced parts of the monument were painted gray, leaving only an empty stele without inscriptions.[30] The fate of a memorial in Oleshky, Kherson region, displaying portraits of local ATO soldiers was similar: in May, the letters forming the word "Ukraine" were ripped out, the photographs were covered with paint, and the column with a trident was destroyed. In June, the memorial was dismantled entirely.[31] In Shevchenkove, Kharkhiv region, a granite trident was dislodged from a memorial to ATO fighters before the monument was removed entirely, on June 29.[32] What was destroyed when was sometimes dictated by the ebb and flow of attention to particular symbolic locations due to the commemorative calendar and propagandistic needs. In other cases, there seems to have been a desire to get rid of the most visible Ukrainian symbols first. Yet in general, the timing depended on logistics as much as on any thought-out program of Russification or (re-)Sovietization.

This incremental iconoclasm means that public space was not immediately wiped clean of symbols of Ukrainian statehood and memory. Emblems of the Russian conquest often co-existed with Ukrainian symbols for some time. On prominent war memorials, the latter were typically removed in time for the widely broadcast Victory Day celebrations on May 9; elsewhere they could remain in place even longer. The Kherson State Maritime Academy continued to display two ATO plaques until early June, even though Russian soldiers were housed there since March. Sometimes even commemorative events organized by the proxy authorities featured the colors of the Ukrainian flag.[33]

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30 https://t.me/hueviyherson/19919, June 4, 2022; fieldwork by Mykola Homanyuk and Olena Taskalina.

31 Personal communication from two residents of Oleshky.

32 Hanna Ts'omyk, "Kolaboranty u Shevchenkovomu na Kharkivshchyni khochut' znesty pam'iatnyk heroiam ATO," *Suspil'ne. Novyny*, June 29, 2022, https://suspilne.media/255195-kolaboranti-u-sevcenkovomu-na-harkivsini-hocut-znesti-pamatnik-geroam-ato; Daniil Petrov, "V Khar'kovskoi oblasti snesli pamiatnik voinam ATO," *Kommentarii.UA*, June 30, 2022, https://kharkov.comments.ua/news/war/2022/11984-v-harkovskoy-oblasti-snesli-pamyatnik-voinam-ato.html.

33 For an example, see Mykhailo Khomchenko, "Khersons'ki zradnyky za movchaznoï pidtrymky rashystiv provely mitynh z komunistychnoiu symvolikoiu," *depo Kherson*,

The gradual manner in which monuments were altered, removed, or destroyed reflects the shifts in Russian plans for the conquered territories. It was not until May–June 2022 that Russian discourse shifted from "de-Nazifying" the occupied parts of Ukraine to outright annexation.

Accordingly, the first layer of modifications often consisted of improvised additions. For instance, as late as the beginning of May, the main change at the Memorial Cemetery for soldiers of the Great Patriotic War in Kherson was the presence of two transparent sheet protectors with A4 printouts of the slogans "Khersonites remember the heroic deeds of the peoples of the USSR" and "Glory to the Soviet soldier."[34] In Bilozerka, Kherson region, an inscription on the local self-propelled artillery vehicle monument that said "Bilozerka is Ukraine" was initially altered to read "Bilozerka is NOT Ukraine," then painted over completely.[35]

Overall, the somewhat haphazard nature of the symbolic modifications of Ukrainian space is somewhat reminiscent of the Soviet occupation of new territories to the west of its borders in 1939–40. At the time, the Soviets destroyed a number of prominent monuments, built several new ones, and renamed places and streets, but they did so much less systematically than they would following the reconquest of these territories in 1944–45.[36]

Rhetorically, at least, the Russian-appointed administrators followed a pattern characteristic of iconoclastic movements through the ages. Iconoclasm has often consisted not in physically removing an image but in displacing it, thereby challenging its claim to represent something transcendent, such as God or historical truth. In their struggle against religion, the Bolsheviks transferred certain icons from churches and monasteries to museums, where they employed sophisticated technology to preserve them as works of art but by that very token denied them a religious significance.[37]

March 13, 2022, https://herson.depo.ua/ukr/herson/khersonski-zradniki-z-movchaznoi-pidtrimki-rashistiv-proveli-miting-z-komunistichnoyu-simvolikoyu-202203131433613.

34 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6725, May 6, 2022, and Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

35 Personal communication from a resident of Bilozirka.

36 For the case of L'viv, see the Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine (TsDAHOU), f. 1 o. 30 spr. 1353 and spr. 1370 for monument removal as late as 1949. For the Estonian case, see the National Archive of Estonia (RA), file ERAF.5.5.65, sheets 26–29 (from 1945).

37 See Besançon, *L'image interdite*. On Bolshevik iconoclasm, see also the discussion in Antonova, *Visual Thought in Russian Religious Philosophy*, 69.

In several cases, removal was accompanied by a promise to display a monument in a museum or other supposedly more appropriate location instead of destroying it. This was the case, for example, with the Sahaidachnyi statue in Manhush, Donets'k region.[38] In Chornobaïvka, Kherson region, plaques to local ATO soldiers that had been added to a Great Patriotic War memorial were removed and replaced with a Victory Banner but not thrown away. Instead, they were installed across the street from a church, on a wall that used to display portraits of those honored for their contribution to socialist labor and now renamed a memorial to victims of what the Russian proxy mayor called Ukraine's "civil war."[39] However, this is the only case we have found where such an alternative display actually transpired, and in general, such comparatively conciliatory language was the exception rather than the norm. Especially on and around Victory Day, Russian propaganda descriptions of Ukrainian monuments typically employed scare quotes and derogatory language suggesting inauthenticity and ugliness, in contrast to the more familiar colors of the Soviet canon. Referring to monuments honoring Ukrainian resistance against Russia in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, one Russian journalist wrote:

> Of one of these creations [*izvaianie*], only the base remains. This protrusion supported an abstruse, oddly-shaped stone colored in bilious blue-and-yellow colors.... As May 9 draws nearer, the settlement assumes its natural colors. Saved from the hands of plunderers, the bas-relief on the Taras Shevchenko house of culture was restored and painted red.[40]

The Russian invaders were not radical iconoclasts; they were not motivated by the mistrust of images as such that has inspired image-breakers throughout the ages. Unlike the prophets Ibrahim, Musa, and Muhammad

38 "V prigorode Mariupolia."

39 "S memoriala v Khersonskoi oblasti ubrali tablichki s ubitymi voennymi Ukrainy," *RIA Novosti*, May 8, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220508/memorial-1787561184.html.

40 "Vozvrashchenie domoi: Fotoreportazh iz Starobel'ska," *Krasnaia vesna*, May 4, 2022, https://rossaprimavera.ru/article/a45d4653. Conversely, Ukrainian media also sometimes placed the word "monument" in scare quotes when referring to monuments newly erected on Russian-occupied territory. For an example, see "V okkupirovannoi Volnovakhe otkryt 'pamiatnik' odnomu iz voennykh prestupnikov," *DonPress*, October 14, 2022, https://donpress.com/news/14-10-2022-v-okkupirovannoy-volnovakhe-otkryt-pamyatnik-odnomu-iz-voennykh-prestupnikov.

in Islamic tradition, they were not opposed to any and all politics grounded in images.[41] Yet like most of those who engage in the destruction of monuments, their objective was to restore an original purity—specifically, a familiar late Soviet configuration of monuments untainted by later additions and modifications.

Monuments spared

Amid the iconoclasm, some Ukrainian monuments were spared by the invaders even though they might have appeared to be obvious targets for destruction. In part, this had to do with the chronology and topography of the Russian advance. The Russian treatment of monuments in each location depended on the length of occupation and the city's size and importance. In places in, for example, the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions that were only occupied for a few weeks at most, the invaders did not get around to installing proxy civilian administrations and hardly had time for more than photo ops and haphazard damage to existing monuments.[42] In cities that were occupied for several months, such as Melitopol', Mariupol', and Kherson, they had more time to stage elaborate pro-Russian commemorative ceremonies and alter existing memorials or even build new ones. Yet their resources were stretched far too thin to do so in every location.

Proceeding along the highways, the Russian troops never established full control over the entire area they claimed to have conquered. In a number of districts located far from the main roads, we have found no evidence of modification of war memorials. Examples include the Ivanivka and Nyzhni Sirohozy municipalities in Kherson region, and the Svatove, Troïts'ke, and Nyzhnia Duvanka municipalities in Luhans'k region, each of which includes several villages. There were many cases when the composition of village councils did not change and Ukrainian flags stayed on public buildings, for example, in the Novotroïts'ke, Ivanivka, and Nyzhni Sirohozy municipalities in the Kherson region. Having traveled to Ivanivka in late August 2023, the Russian proxy governor, Volodymyr Sal'do, complained that Ukrainian symbols were still not removed—over

41 Tugendhaft, *The Idols of ISIS*, 12–13.

42 Mykola Homanyuk's interviews on April 28, 2023, with Andrii Bohdan, the mayor of Horodnia, Chernihiv region, and Maryna Hal'ko, deputy head of the administration of Mykhailo-Kotsiubyns'ke, Chernihiv region.

a year and a half into the occupation.[43] (In addition, one might speculate that the far heavier presence of soldiers from the self-proclaimed Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics in the southern and eastern parts of the occupied regions aggravated the damage to ATO monuments in those areas. Separatists would have been more likely to have been involved in fighting the Ukrainian army since 2014 and would thus see monument destruction as an act of revenge.)

Accordingly, even in locations with a heavy and long-term Russian presence, not all memorials displaying Ukrainian symbols were targeted. Even in Kherson, a small memorial displaying a large Ukrainian trident was left untouched. Commemorating Volodymyr Kedrovs'kyi, a colonel for the Ukrainian People's Republic of 1917–1921, the granite slab was located near a Russian army checkpoint on a large road in a residential area and yet remained untouched throughout the occupation. Also in Kherson, several makeshift memorials to Territorial Defense (military reserve) fighters, in the form of crosses with blue-and-yellow ribbons tied to tree trunks, were created in spring 2022 close to the Buzkovyi Hai (Lilac Grove) site where they had died fighting the Russian army on March 1. They were adjacent to the above-mentioned ATO monument theatrically blown up by a supposed former Territorial Defense member. Yet the 2022 memorial remained unscathed throughout the occupation period. Another example is a memorial to local policemen killed in the line of duty since 1953. Located in central Kherson opposite what became a Russian military base following the occupation, the large memorial includes ATO volunteers among the dead it commemorates, including policemen such as Roman Nabehov and Ruslan Storcheus, whose individual memorials elsewhere in Kherson were destroyed. It also features several Ukrainian tridents. Nevertheless, the monument remained completely unaltered until mid-September, and even then the only modification was the removal of one trident (symbolizing the Ministry of the Interior) from the monument itself, with the plaques left intact.[44]

The decision to spare these monuments appears to stem from a sense of corporate identification. The Russian invaders, many of whom have a past or present association with Russia's Ministry of the Interior, appear to identify with fellow law enforcement professionals even if they served Ukraine, leading them to spare monuments that commemorate policemen

43 https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/1137, August 29, 2023.
44 Mykola Homanyuk's field observations.

through their professional identity rather than their participation in military conflict with Russia. They also seem to regard men drafted into the Territorial Defense forces as legitimate soldiers who had no choice but to fight, unlike ATO volunteers they see as ideological nationalists. The way in which corporate identity can trump national divisions could also be seen in certain ceremonies, especially on some of the many professional holidays rooted in late Soviet tradition.[45] Thus, in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, there were reports of residents being shot in the streets for wearing ribbons in the colors of the Ukrainian flag.[46] Yet participants in a Russian-sanctioned procession on Russia's Border Guard Day carried a variety of different flags, including one with the emblem of the Ukrainian border guard service, and some of them were wearing Ukrainian uniforms.[47]

While rare, there may also have been cases in which ATO memorials were spared by Russian military commanders out of a sense of respect for the other side's dead.[48] Another explanation referred to Russian soldiers' biographical connections with Ukraine, generating urban legends similar to those circulating during and after the Second World War about why certain German towns were spared from Allied bombing. Two administrators of liberated towns in Chernihiv region stated that some Russian fighter pilots were dropping their bombs in the surrounding forests instead of Chernihiv or other towns in the region because they had trained at the Chernihiv Higher Military Aviation School of Pilots. By extension, this would also have been why they spared Ukrainian war memorials.[49]

Another memorial somewhat unexpectedly spared during the occupation was one commemorating Stalin's 1944 deportation of the Crimean Tatars from their homeland in Crimea. The first such memorial in Ukraine

45 Catriona Kelly and Svetlana Sirotinina, "'I Didn't Understand It, But It Was Funny': Late Soviet Festivals and Their Impact on Children," *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, no. 5 (2009): 254–300.

46 "'Mozhut' rozstriliaty za syn'o-zhovtu strichku': pro te, iak zhyve Melitopol' pid rosiis'koiu okupatsiieiu," *Radio Svoboda*, July 14, 2022, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/novyny-pryazovya-melitopol-okupatsiya/31942189.html.

47 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7821, May 28, 2022.

48 This is how Ukrainian politician and battalion commander Petro Kuzyk interprets a case of limited damage to a memorial that he encountered on the front line: Islnd TV, "Kuzyk: pravda pro Bakhmut, bataľion 'Svoboda', okopni boï, pekeľna TRO, piar na trupakh," Antypody, Youtube video, 51:06 [35:26–36:30], March 18, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_9OCyvBIes.

49 Mykola Homanyuk's interviews on April 28, 2023, with Andrii Bohdan, the mayor of Horodnia, Chernihiv region, and Maryna Hal'ko, deputy head of the administration of Mykhailo-Kotsiubyns'ke, Chernihiv region.

outside of Crimea, it was installed in Kherson in 2019 to mark the 75th anniversary of the deportation. (The small memorial was later destroyed by artillery fire in April 2023.)[50] We can only speculate why the Russian forces initially left the monument untouched, but their actions appear to echo the management of memorials to the deportation in occupied Crimea. While at least one such memorial, located outside Sevastopol', was destroyed by unknown vandals on Victory Day 2019, just three days after it was erected,[51] the occupation authorities have sponsored or approved the creation of several Crimean Tatar monuments, such as a statue of the activist Reşid Mediyev (1880–1912) in Bilohirs'k and a deportation memorial in Süren (now Syren') near Bakhchysarai, one of the largest deportation terminals in 1944.[52] The reasons for this support are complex, but they probably include a desire to divert attention from damage done to Crimean Tatar heritage in Crimea, such as the Khan's Palace in Bakhchysarai,[53] and from the way the Crimean Tatars have been demoted from their status as an indigenous people, which they had been guaranteed under Ukrainian law.[54]

Monuments stolen

Another way in which the Russians interacted with monuments was by stealing them. The looting of cultural heritage is usually discussed either in the context of European overseas colonialism or of expansionist mil-

50 Mykola Homanyuk's field observations. On the creation of the memorial, see "V Khersone otkryli pamiatnik zhertvam genotsida krymskotatarskogo naroda," *ATR*, May 18, 2019, https://atr.ua/news/186713-v-hersone-otkryli-pamatnik-zertvam-genocida-krymskotatarskogo-naroda.

51 "Vandals Smash New Monument To Crimean Tatar WWII Victims," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 9, 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/newly-installed-monument-to-crimean-tatar-wwii-victims-vandalized/29931904.html.

52 "V Belogorske ustanovili pamiatnik krymskotatarskomu politiku Abdureshidu Medievu," *Krym.Realii*, October 18, 2021, https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-krym-krymskiye-tatary-pamyatnik-mediyevu-belogorsk/31516533.html; "Piat' let podriad: kak stroiat memorial v pamiat' o zhertvakh deportatsii na stantsii Siuren'," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, May 17, 2021, https://www.rferl.org/a/photo-memorialnyy-kompleks-v-pamyato-zhertvakh-deportatsii/31259106.html.

53 UkrInform, "Russian Invaders Destroy Golden Cabinet in Khan's Palace in Occupied Crimea," *Kyiv Post*, December 17, 2022, https://www.kyivpost.com/post/5850.

54 "V Krymu s pamiatnika zhertvam deportatsii potrebovali ubrat' slovo 'korennoi': Rech'idet o krymskikh tatarakh," *Idel'.Realii*, November 19, 2021, https://www.idelreal.org/a/31569626.html. We thank Mariia Shynkarenko for sharing these sources about the Bilohirs'k and Süren monuments as well as her interpretation with us.

itary campaigns such as those of the Second World War.[55] In addition to countless easily transportable cultural artifacts, Europeans also brought large monuments to imperial capitals, from the Luxor Obelisk installed in Paris in the 1830s to the Pergamon Altar, taken to Berlin bit by bit later in the nineteenth century.

To the extent that any justifications were provided at the time of removal or in more recent restitution debates, they often came in technical guise, claiming that the artifacts had been unearthed by Western archaeologists, that they had been gifted or sold to Europeans by locals, or that European countries could take better care of the objects than the countries of origin. Other arguments, however, have sought to establish lines of continuity suggesting that present-day imperial powers, rather than local residents, were the rightful heirs to the creators of an artifact. The typical narrative of Western Civilization, traced from Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Biblical origins to modern Western Europe and North America, implied that Westerners—rather than the supposedly culturally backward modern residents of Iraq, the Levant, Egypt, or Greece—were the legitimate proprietors of ancient monuments, created by "their" (cultural or spiritual) ancestors.

Arguments of this kind have long featured in the history of Russian imperial expansion. Styling itself the Third Rome and the true heir to Byzantium as guardian of the Orthodox realms, elites in the Russian Empire regularly revived fantasies of capturing Istanbul, the former Constantinople, from the Ottomans. In the nineteenth century, in declaring themselves protectors of the Orthodox citizens of the Ottoman Empire, they would often justify military intervention by pointing to the presence of churches and monasteries on which the Eastern Slavs had modeled their own sacred buildings and which could thus be portrayed as cradles of Russian civilization.

An even longer tradition of relocation revolves around the afterlives of human remains. In the Christian and, to some extent, in the Islamic world, for a long time, saints' relics were transported to capture part of the sanctity associated with them. Yet the location of relics, and more generally of burial sites, has also long been a matter of constructing continuity across

55 Isabelle Dolezalek, Bénédicte Savoy, and Robert Skwirblies, eds., *Beute: Eine Anthologie zu Kunstraub und Kulturerbe* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021); Merten Lagatz, Bénédicte Savoy, and Philippa Sissis, eds., *Beute: Ein Bildatlas zu Kunstraub und Kulturerbe* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021).

time and space. Just as monasteries and shrines have long had a geopolitical significance, both the Russian Empire and its successors, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, have long used soldiers' graves, memorials, and monuments to stake out geopolitical claims and embody narratives of continuity. Thus, during the Second World War, the Red Army and its political commissars rediscovered many Tsarist-era war memorials in places as diverse as Ukraine, Estonia, Germany, Poland, or Bulgaria, and typically built new memorials next to them to draw a line of continuity between military exploits old and new. However, when the Soviet Union took cultural artifacts from German territory, this was understood as exacting reparations for earlier German looting of Soviet heritage rather than as repatriating items that had always belonged to Russia.[56]

In the Russian occupation of Ukraine, things were different. Looting was endemic, responding to the dual desire to deny Ukraine a claim to its cultural heritage and to declare that heritage Russian.[57] Soviet-era war memorials were not spared such reinterpretation. Thus, in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, following the city's liberation in the fall of 1943, a T-70 tank was installed on a pedestal over a communal grave. In April 2023, the Russian occupiers declared they would restore the tank to let it participate in a Victory Day parade; when they found out it had no engine, they took it to Saint Petersburg instead, claiming to prepare it for another parade in Melitopol' in October.[58]

When withdrawing from Kherson, along with countless artifacts from the Regional History and Arts Museums, the occupiers also removed four monuments as well as the bones of the city's founder, Prince Grigorii Potemkin. The Russians had identified the monuments—statues of Potemkin and Admiral Fedor Ushakov as well as busts of General

56 On the German-Russian restitution debate in European context, see the special thematic issue "Kunst im Konflikt: Kriegsfolgen und Kooperationsfelder in Europa," in *Osteuropa* 56, no. 1/2 (2006).

57 Jeffrey Gettleman and Oleksandra Mykolyshyn, "As Russians Steal Ukraine's Art, They Attack Its Identity, Too," *New York Times*, January 14, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/14/world/asia/ukraine-art-russia-steal.html; "'Iakby ne kolaboranty, my by vriatuvaly muzei vid rosiian': Interviu z dyrektorkoiu Khersons'koho khudozhn'oho muzeiiu," *Ukraïns'ka pravda*, November 12, 2022, https://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2022/11/12/251267.

58 "V Melitopole okkupanty ukrali s postamenta tank T-70: uvorovannyi eksponat 'zasvetilsia' v RF," *Fokus*, May 30, 2023, https://focus.ua/voennye-novosti/569400-v-melitopole-okkupanty-ukrali-s-postamenta-tank-t-70-uvorovannyj-eksponat-zasvetilsya-v-rf-video.

Aleksandr Suvorov and Soviet general Vasyl' Marhelov (Vasilii Margelov in Russian)—early on as important parts of the local heritage that they laid claim to as embodiments of the city's Russian past.[59] Representing three eighteenth-century military leaders and one from the Second World War, the monuments were among the city's most iconic war memorials and also—contested—embodiments of local identity.

As the Russian troops were preparing to abandon Kherson, a Russian nationalist politician included the monuments in a list of cultural heritage that he recommended the army take with them.[60] Sure enough, two days later, Russian proxy administrators declared that they, as well as the remains of Potemkin's body, had been "evacuated" from the city and transported to the Russian-controlled left bank of the Dnipro.[61]

The occupiers' logic was particularly twisted. Along with three other regions, Kherson region had been declared part of Russia just three weeks earlier following sham referendums. For Russian propaganda, this automatically made all local cultural heritage Russian and therefore in need of protection from Ukraine. The larger claim, of course, was that Kherson's monuments had been Russian all along. Their removal implied that Ukraine had somehow stolen these monuments simply by becoming independent, or at least by daring to use its sovereignty to make decisions that did not align with (retrospective) Russian preferences. Likening the Potemkin statue to a traveling potentate, proxy governor Volodymyr Sal'do quipped: "Let him look not only at Kherson, but at the entire Kherson region."[62]

Sal'do's attempts to justify the theft of the statues mirrored the general difficulty the occupiers had building a coherent discourse about the continuity of the region's supposed Russian identity across the Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. Originally built in 1836, the Potemkin statue was moved to the courtyard of the regional history museum in 1927 under the Bolsheviks and later vanished during the Second World War. A modified copy was installed in 2003 under Sal'do's mayorship of Kherson. Thus the restoration of a supposed symbol of the city's Russianness had taken

59 "Istoricheskoe nasledie," *Naddneprianskaia pravda*, June 29, 2022—the very first issue of the occupation newspaper.

60 https://t.me/grigorov_prav/2151, October 22, 2022.

61 https://t.me/stranaua/71566, October 24, 2022; Alëna Busalaeva, "Iz Ekaterininskogo sobora v Khersone vyvezli moshchi Potëmkina, - Sal'do," *Krym24*, October 26, 2022, https://crimea24tv.ru/content/iz-ekaterininskogo-sobora-v-khersone-v/.

62 Busalaeva, "Iz Ekaterininskogo sobora."

place in independent Ukraine, rather than in the Soviet period that the occupiers usually claimed they wanted to revert back to. And yet Sal'do focused on this monument rather than the Soviet-era Ushakov monument and the Suvorov bust. The bust of Soviet general Marhelov, likewise, had been put up in independent Ukraine (in 2010) and thus did not fit the narrative about "Russian heritage."[63]

In a sense, Sal'do's arguments echoed those of earlier colonial invaders in denying Ukrainians the right to manage monuments on their own territory as they see fit. They also betrayed a sense of personal ownership: since the Potemkin statue had been erected during his tenure as mayor, he implied, he had a personal right to decide its fate. Looting was equated with preservation, on the assumption that Ukraine might want to remove those monuments in acts of de-Russification and decommunization, but of course these policies themselves were responses to Russian aggression (see chapter 6).

Thus, for all of Russia's portrayal of itself as a victim of Western imperialism, its treatment of monuments in Ukraine was itself resolutely imperialist. Other post-Soviet countries, such as Armenia, have tapped into the twenty-first-century global restitution debate. Engaging in what Adam T. Smith has called "a deft sublimation of irredentism into the far more subtle lexicon of global cultural heritage, of landscape into materiality," they have asked for the restitution of objects that cannot be traced to their current national territory, in a bid to further their irredentist claims to other regions.[64] Russia, by contrast, has as it were moved back into the nineteenth century.[65] It deploys an exclusively imperialist repertoire, creating facts on the ground by destroying, altering, or moving objects of material heritage as it pleases and drawing on symbols of its own prior imperial rule.

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63 "V Khersone otkryli pamiatnik glavnomu desantniku generalu Margelovu—legendarnomu Diade Vase," *Tsenzor.NET*, February 22, 2010, https://censor.net/ru/photo_news/113833/v_hersone_otkryli_pamyatnik_glavnomu_desantniku_generalu_margelovu__legendarnomu_dyade_vase_fotore.

64 Adam T. Smith, "Heritage, Irredentism, Materiality," *Assemblages: Things, Places, and the Archaeology of Eurasia* (blog), March 19, 2012, https://blogs.cornell.edu/adamtsmith/2012/03/19/heritage-irredentism-materiality/.

65 Here we echo Georgiy Kasianov's observations about the historical roots of Russia's current politics of history: Georgiy Kasianov, "Ukraine: When Tensions over the Past Morph into War," in *A New Global Order? History and Power Politics in the Era of Zeitenwende*, History Hotspot (Hamburg: Körber Stiftung, 2022), 5–6.

Chapter 4
Monuments (Re-)Built

Where Ukrainian decommunization had removed Soviet-era monuments and replaced them with new ones, the invaders were not always content with getting rid of the Ukrainian memorials. Echoing the restorationist justification for invasion, they set about restoring some Soviet monuments.

In doing so, the Russian occupiers proclaimed that the recent past had been an aberration. Now Russia was back to turn things back to normal. However, their conception of what was normal remained hazy in both content and chronology. Rhetorically, they situated the golden age either before the Revolution of Dignity of 2014 or before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, knocking down, altering, or replacing Ukrainian monuments never resulted in a return to the previous state. Instead, the Russians always ended up creating something previously unseen: new, differently shaped Lenin statues replaced those removed by Ukrainians; eternal flames were lit at war memorials where none had burned before; and polychrome monuments were presented as evidence of Russian care. Statues and portraits of figures from Russian history went up in places those figures had no connection with, and Soviet Victory banners were hoisted alongside Russian flags and stylized portraits of Jesus Christ.

This reflected the syncretism of historical culture in present-day Russia, where nostalgia for past greatness tends to throw together seemingly incompatible symbols dating from different periods of Russian and Soviet history. Yet their policy also followed the peculiar tradition of Russian heritage management. The historian Julie Deschepper has argued that the Bolsheviks developed an approach to built heritage that often involved destroying material objects in order to rebuild them bet-

ter.[1] This approach was applied to countless local war memorials in western parts of the Soviet Union, knocked down in the 1960s to make way for "artistically superior" structures.[2] It was also in evidence in Russia's post-Soviet wars: in Chechnya, Russian troops devastated entire city blocks during hostilities, then Russian companies secured commissions to build supposedly more beautiful quarters.[3] In Syria, in turn, the now Moscow-aligned Chechnya engaged in the same type of reconstruction following a war in which Russia behaved in similarly destructive fashion.[4] Starting in 2022, the same policy was implemented in Ukrainian Mariupol', devastated by the brutal Russian onslaught.

This chapter explores Russia's monument (re)building policies in occupied Ukraine and their contradictions.

Lenin's return

Several Lenin statues or busts that had been taken down in what became known as the Leninfall[5] went back up: for instance, in Heniches'k, Nova

1 Deschepper, "Between Future and Eternity." See also her forthcoming book: Deschepper, *Le temps du patrimoine soviétique. Une histoire matérielle de la Russie*.

2 The example of Moldova is documented in a report from October 1963 about the state of war graves in the republic: ANA-DAOSP (National Archives Agency of Moldova, Directorate of Socio-Political Organizations) F. 51 i. 23 d. 27 f. 27–30.

3 Musa Basnukaev, "Reconstruction in Chechnya: At the Intersection between Politics and the Economy," in *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, ed. Anne Le Huérou et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 76–89.

4 Frederick Deknatel, "Reconstruction, Who Decides?," in *Cultural Heritage and Mass Atrocities*, ed. James Cuno and Thomas G. Weiss (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2022), 220–37.

5 On Lenin statues in Ukraine and the Leninfall, see especially Oleksandra Gaidai's studies: Oleksandra Gaidai, "Memoralization of Lenin: Legislation and Attitudes (On the Materials of Kyiv, Vinnytsia and Cherkasy Regions)," *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, no. 2 (2015): 137–54; Oleksandra Haidai [Gaidai], *Kamianyi hist'. Lenin u Tsentral'nii Ukraïni. Vydannia druhe* (Kyiv: K.I.S., 2018); Oleksandra Gaidai, "Leninfall in Ukraine: How Did the Lenin Statues Disappear?," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 38, no. 1/2 (2021): 45–70; Oleksandra Gaidai, "'Take Me to a Mausoleum': Coping with Lenin's Statue in Poltava," in *The Political Cult of the Dead in Ukraine: Traditions and Dimensions from the First World War to Today*, ed. Guido Hausmann and Iryna Sklokina (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2021), 223–37. On the case of Poltava, see also Lina Klymenko, "Choosing Mazepa Over Lenin: The Transformation of Monuments and Political Order in Post-Maidan Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 5 (2020): 815–36. For interpretations of the wider cultural meanings of the Leninfall, see Serhii Plokhii, "Goodbye Lenin: A Memory Shift in Revolutionary Ukraine (Working Paper)," November 2018, https://gis.huri.harvard.edu/files/leninfallpaper.pdf; Anastasiya Pshenychnykh, "Leninfall: The Spectacle of Forgetting," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020): 393–414. Dominique Colas, *Poutine, l'Ukraine et les statues de*

Kakhovka, and Hornostaïvka, Kherson region; in Melitopol' and the village of Dolyns'ke, Zaporizhzhia region; in at least one place in Kharkiv region; and in a number of places across the newly occupied parts of the Donets'k and Luhan'sk regions. Tatiana Zhurzhenko has noted the irony of the Russian invaders reerecting Lenin statues even though Vladimir Putin had blamed Lenin for creating what he described as the state of Ukraine in his speech justifying the invasion.[6] Whereas in some locations toppled Lenins were taken back out of storage, in other cases the statues were made from scratch and struck new poses.[7]

In keeping with Lenin's role as a symbol of nostalgia for the late Soviet period, the monuments were often installed on or around dates from the Soviet festive calendar, whose importance has receded in post-Soviet times not only in Ukraine but also in Russia, especially International Workers' Day (May 1) and October Revolution Day (November 7).[8] Other

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Lénine (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2023), provides broad historical context and also discusses some of the developments since 2022. On the Soviet-era construction of statues of Lenin and other communist leaders, as well as early post-Soviet iconoclasm, see Bogdan S. Tscherkes, "Denkmäler von Führern des sowjetischen Kommunismus in der Ukraine," in *Bildersturm in Osteuropa: die Denkmäler der kommunistischen Ära im Umbruch: eine Tagung des Deutschen Nationalkomitees von ICOMOS, des Instituts für Auslandsbeziehungen und der Senatsverwaltung Berlin in der Botschaft der Russischen Förderation in Berlin, 18.–20. Februar 1993*, ed. Florian Fiedler and Michael Petzet, ICOMOS—Hefte des deutschen Nationalkomitees, XIII (Munich: Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, 1994), 39–45. On vandalism of OUN/UPA monuments in response to attacks on Soviet monuments such as Lenin statues, see Myshlovska, "The Sacralization of the Ukrainian Statehood," 269–70.

6 Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Terror, Kollaboration und Widerstand: Russlands Herrschaft in den neu besetzten Gebieten der Ukraine," *Osteuropa*, nos. 6–8 (2022): 190.

7 Julie Deschepper, "Le retour de Lénine ou la militarisation de l'histoire," *AOC*, August 5, 2022, https://aoc.media/analyse/2022/05/08/le-retour-de-lenine-ou-la-militarisation-de-lhistoire.

8 "V Genicheske vosstanavlivaiut pamiatnik Leninu," *Kherson.life*, April 18, 2022, https://kherson.life/kherson/v-genicheske-vosstanavlivayut-pamyatnik-leninu-foto/; Aleksandr Grishin, "V ukrainskom Genicheske vernuli na mesto pamiatnik Leninu, a nad zdaniem administratsii povesili rossiiskii flag," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, April 18, 2022, https://www.kp.ru/daily/27380/4574651/; "V Melitopole vernuli na prezhnee mesto pamiatnik Leninu," *TASS*, November 5, 2022, https://tass.ru/obschestvo/16253859; "V s. Dolinskoe Berdianskogo r-n Zaporozhskoi oblasti mestnye zhiteli ustanovili na prezhnee mesto pamiatnik Leninu," *Lenta novostei Zaporozh'ia*, November 7, 2022, https://zp-news.ru/society/2022/11/07/54864.html; "Okkupanty vernuli v Svetlodarsk snesennogo 9 let nazad Lenina," *Tsenzor.NET*, December 3, 2022, https://censor.net/ru/photo_news/3384607/okkupanty_vernuli_v_svetlodarsk_snesennogo_9_let_nazad_lenina_foto; "V Novoi Kakhovke vernuli pamiatnik Leninu," *Moskva24*, May 1, 2022, https://www.m24.ru/videos/za-rubezhom/01052022/457233.

dates chosen for such ceremonies were Lenin's birthday and the 100th anniversary of the creation of the USSR.[9]

In a school in the Kharkiv region, the occupiers put up a new Lenin bust before the end of the summer vacation, proclaiming that pupils would start the new school year as in Soviet times, "wearing red scarves."[10] In Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, the occupation administration reattached an outsized Order of Lenin and a commemorative plaque to an obelisk erected in 1968 for the 50th anniversary of the Communist Youth League; a few months later, it restored a Lenin bust next to it.[11] In Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia region, there was a Soviet-era placeholder monument to Red Army soldiers executed by Baron Petr Wrangel's White Army in 1920. After 2015, plaques with the Ukrainian flag and trident and a dedication to an unspecified group of "the dead" were attached to it, covering up the previous (Ukrainian-language) inscription. The Russians removed those plaques to uncover the previous inscription.[12]

In addition to decommunization, some monuments had suffered as a result of fighting, both before and after February 24, 2022. In 2003, Ukraine's president Leonid Kuchma and Moscow's mayor Iurii Luzhkov had jointly opened a monument to Prince Ihor', the protagonist of the famous medieval epic *The Lay of Ihor's Host*, in Stanyts'ia Luhans'ka, Luhans'k region. Unveiled on the 65th anniversary of the establishment of Luhans'k region, the monument also marked the opening of a new highway and was installed high on a mound. In 2014, the area became part of the so-called contact line between Ukrainian and Russian forces, and the complex was heavily damaged by shelling. In November 2022, Russian state media announced that they had rebuilt the monument, which they claimed had been "barbarously subjected to heavy fire" and "deliberately

9 Iuliia Mikhailova, "Luganskaia oblast': V Starobel'ske vosstanovlen pamiatnik V.I. Leninu," Kommunisticheskaia partiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii, December 7, 2022, https://kprf.ru/international/ussr/215082.html.

10 "Okkupanty ustanovili v litsee na Khar'kovshchine biust Lenina," *Kharkiv Today*, August 20, 2022, https://2day.kh.ua/ru/kharkow/okkupanty-ustanovili-v-licee-na-kharkovschine-byust-lenina.

11 "Torzhestvennoe otkrytie vosstanovlennogo obeliska Komsomol'skoi Slavy proshlo v Starobel'ske," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 9, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/torzhestvennoe-otkrytie-vosstanovlennogo-obeliska-komsomol-skoj-slavy-proshlo-v-starobel-ske; Mikhailova, "Luganskaia oblast'."

12 https://t.me/v_and_z/842, June 4, 2022.

destroyed in the course of an eight-year war" by the Ukrainian side.[13] To illustrate the narrative of continuity between Prince Ihor's campaign against the Polovtsians in 1185 and the reconquest of Luhans'k region, they drew cartoonlike symbols of the 2022 invasion on the monument: an armed soldier with a Z symbol, a tank displaying a gonfalon flag of Christ, and two combat drones.[14]

Nevertheless, the type of memorial renovated by far the most frequently and with the greatest fanfare were monuments to the Great Patriotic War.

"Eight (thirty?) years of neglect"

One of the claims consistently repeated in Russian propaganda texts and videos and in speeches at commemorative ceremonies concerned Ukraine's alleged hostility toward Great Patriotic War and other military memorials. A week into the invasion, a Russian propaganda website posted a text titled "A complex matter explained in simple terms: Russia's aims and tasks in the operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine," which was later republished countless times as a justification for the invasion, including on the websites of Russian educational institutions and municipalities. Among other points, it stated that "the denazification of Ukraine aims to secure a rejection by Ukraine's current leadership of vandalism—the destruction of numerous memorials to soldiers and officers of the Soviet Army who liberated Ukraine from the German fascist invaders during the Great Patriotic War."[15]

The Russian invaders frequently repeated the assertion that, during the eight years since the Euromaidan or even the three decades since Ukraine's independence, the country's authorities had neglected such

13 "V LNR otkryli vosstanovlennyi memorial 'Kniaz' Igor''," *RIA Novosti*, November 21, 2022, https://ria.ru/20221121/memorial-1833069491.html; "Vossozdannyi pamiatnik kniaziu Igoriu otkryt v stanitse Luganskoi v LNR," *Pervyi kanal*, November 21, 2022, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2022-11-21/441971-vossozdannyy_pamyatnik_knyazyu_igoryu_otkryt_v_stanitse_luganskoy_v_lnr.

14 "BLA "Geran'" stanoviatsia chast'iu kul'tury," *Lenta novostei Luganska*, November 24, 2022, https://lugansk-news.ru/society/2022/11/24/33529.html.

15 Zakhar Vinogradov, "Prosto o slozhnom: Tseli i zadachi Rossii v operatsii po demilitarizatsii i denatsifikatsii Ukrainy," *Ukraina.ru*, March 3, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20220303151345/https://ukraina.ru/exclusive/20220303/1033432311.html.

memorials, that they had actively prevented local residents from maintaining them and performing commemorative ceremonies, or, worst of all, had deliberately removed or destroyed such monuments or tacitly supported activists engaged in such destruction. In the words of an official of the occupation administration in Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region, quoted in a propaganda newspaper: "It is very important that today in our towns we can peacefully celebrate and commemorate our heroes and conduct events by the eternal flame and monuments to the Great Patriotic War, and that nobody prevents us from doing so."[16] Volodymyr Sal'do, the Russian-appointed Kherson regional governor, proclaimed that "we are once again restoring historical justice, the memory they tried to take from us."[17] In the Russian narrative, liberation from the Ukrainian yoke finally made people free to follow their dreams of renovating war memorials: "The community project 'Young Builders of Kherson' emerged almost spontaneously: the youngsters came forward to offer their help in restoring the city's derelict monuments."[18]

The timeframe given for the supposed period of neglect, obstruction, and memory theft was hazy. Sometimes it was vaguely referred to as "so many years of anti-Russian propaganda, intimidation, and terror."[19] One Russian collaborator stated that Great Patriotic War memorials were still maintained under President Viktor Ianukovych, but "under Zelens'kyi, during the three-four years that he has been around, nobody is taking care of them, the authorities have no need for this."[20]

Most frequently, the start of the period to be repudiated was dated to 2014 or soon thereafter. A widely circulated Russian newspaper claimed outright that in 2022, "Victory Day will be celebrated in Ukraine for the first time in seven years."[21] In one video from an unnamed village in the Luhans'k region, a resident claimed that after 2014, people were full of

16 "Pochtili pamiat' pogibshikh v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine," *Tavricheskie vesti 9(70)*, June 20–29, 2022.

17 "'U nas est' pravo vosstanoviť istoricheskuiu spravedlivosť—v Khersone proshel Den' pamiati i skorbi," *Lenta novostei Khersona*, June 22, 2022, https://kherson-news.ru/society/2022/06/22/8700.html.

18 "Dan' pamiati," *Naddneprianskaia pravda*, July 21, 2022.

19 Aleksandr Egortsev, *Den' Pobedy na Dnepre* (Spas: Glavnoe s Annoi Shafran, 2022), https://web.archive.org/web/20220520021240/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQnoKsaHloU, 6:40.

20 https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022, at 1:15.

21 Irina Gerts, "Na Ukraine vpervye za sem' let otmetiat Den' Pobedy," *Komsomol'skaia pravda. Spetsial'nyi vypusk: Den' Pobedy!*, May 7, 2022.

fear when celebrating Victory Day at the local memorial.[22] In another video showing the removal of symbols and portraits from a memorial to the Heavenly Hundred in central Kherson, the commentator mentions that the monument used to display portraits of heroes of labor. In 2014, he continues, it was defiled when Ukrainians decided to use it for portraits of people used as cannon fodder in a civil war, forcing locals to worship them, and hoisted an EU flag, which is "a symbol of war, a symbol of murderers."[23] The Russian forces later used the monument to display portraits of Great Patriotic War heroes from Kherson and the colors of the St. George's Ribbon (see chapter 7 on this Russian symbol of war memory).[24]

Yet frequently, Russian propagandists referred to the entire period of Ukrainian independence as a dark age. Local residents, one video claimed, had waited for Russia's return for 30 years: "30 years of division and zombification, 30 years of nationalism and Russophobia."[25] In one video from Beryslav, Kherson region, a man presented as a local volunteer who had started maintaining a local tank monument on his own stated that "the population has degraded completely over these 30 years, not just for eight years. Over the past eight years, the degradation has just become stronger." He claimed that he had wanted to take care of the memorial "over the past eight years" but was afraid to do so because of "the state apparatus that was purposefully getting rid of all those it disliked" and that the police and SBU security services would have "tied" him "hand and foot" to prevent him from doing so.[26]

When no evidence of actual change in local commemorative practices could be detected, the 2022 shift was construed as a purely emotional one, from insincere to authentic memory. Thus, a priest interviewed for a propaganda video about Victory Day in Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia region, stated that in previous years, "unfortunately these words had very often been a mere formality," whereas "now we truly feel how important this is."[27] It is only now that "the traditions of honoring the memory of one's ances-

22 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6733, May 6, 2022.
23 https://t.me/kherson_non_fake/694, April 11, 2022.
24 Mykola Homanyuk's field observations and photos.
25 Egortsev, *Den' Pobedy na Dnepre*, 11:05 and 12:20.
26 https://t.me/shot_shot/39151, May 4, 2022.
27 https://t.me/v_and_z/570, May 8, 2022. In fact, the visibly nervous priest, perhaps speaking under duress, appeared to phrase his message in a deliberately ambiguous way. While he suggested that the previous period was marked by insincere commemoration, the "it"

tors are being restored in Kherson region," a propaganda video claimed in the runup to Army Day 2023.[28]

Russian media also frequently reported on the removal and alterations of war monuments in unoccupied Ukraine (as well as other Central and East European countries) since February 24. Presenting such actions as "aggressive de-Russification,"[29] they systematically omitted to mention that they were a response to the Russian attack. They also emphasized real or imagined damage done to monuments since the start of the full-scale invasion in areas then captured by Russian troops. Thus, after the devastating Russian onslaught on Mariupol', Donets'k region, a Russian news agency claimed that Ukrainian "nationalists" had deliberately shot at a bronze bust of World War II-era Rear Admiral Mykola Lunin, targeting one of his medals (no evidence of damage was provided).[30]

The chronology of the Great Patriotic War could also be hazy, as the Russians' local collaborators were sometimes slow to switch to the standardized Russian discourse about the war. Thus, the Russian-appointed head of the administration of Hola Prystan', Kherson region, stated that his grandparents went through "the entire Great Patriotic War from 1939 to 1945," which he said had touched the family of every Ukrainian. He was clearly influenced by the recent official shift in Ukraine to talking about Ukrainian victims during the entire period of the Second World War rather than just the Great Patriotic War, whose beginning Soviet and Russian tradition dates to 1941. He then went on to agree with the interviewer's claim that the Ukrainian authorities had been removing monuments to heroes of the Great Patriotic War.[31]

The main problem with such claims was the overwhelming evidence that Great Patriotic War memorials had not only been left standing but that the vast majority of them—including the Beryslav tank monument—

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in his words referred to "a peaceful sky above our heads" and could be understood as a simple desire for peace, as a lesson learned from the Second World War.

28 https://t.me/tavriya_kherson/4087, February 22, 2023, 2:07.

29 "Na Ukraine prodolzhaetsia demontazh pamiatnikov, sviazannykh s rossiiskoi istoriei i kul'turoi," *Podmoskov'e segodnia*, April 22, 2022, https://mosregtoday.ru/culture/na-ukraine-prodolzhaetsya-demontazh-pamyatnikov-svyazannyh-s-rossiyskoy-istoriey-i-kul-turoy/.

30 "V Mariupole ukrainskie boeviki povredili pamiatnik Geroiu Sovetskogo Soiuza," *RIA Novosti*, June 4, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220604/mariupol-1793145595.html.

31 "Rol' mestnogo samoupravleniia v novykh usloviiakh. Neprostoe vremia trebuet neprostykh reshenii. Interv'iu s glavoi Golopristanskoi administratsii Nedialkovym Gennadiem Georgievichem," *Golopristanskii vestnik*, July–August 2022.

were actually well-maintained.[32] Upon discovering intact war memorials, Russians who had believed their own country's propaganda sometimes appeared sincerely surprised.[33]

In the face of this, Russian propagandists sometimes opted for a rhetoric of popular resistance against Ukrainianization and de-Sovietization: "Having visited several localities, we saw that the monuments are in good condition. This attests that, despite the position of the official Kyiv authorities, people are finding the time and are willing and able to take care of memorials and uphold the historical truth about the Great Patriotic War."[34]

Despite assertions about unleashing war memory, the occupation did not necessarily lead to more commemorative activity. In some cases, events were actually toned down. Thus, the village of Berezhanka, Verkhniorohachyts'kyi district, Kherson region, in 2021 had seen an elaborate and centrally organized Victory Day ceremony attended by the entire student body of the local school; in 2022, the event was self-organized and much smaller.[35]

Some brief online research usually suffices to debunk Russian claims about Ukrainian mistreatment of Great Patriotic War memorials. In most cases, it is easy to find photos of these monuments in good condition before February 24, 2022, and videos of commemorative ceremonies that involve them. A series of propaganda videos from Velyka Bilozerka, Zaporizhzhia region, provides a particularly egregious example. The Velyka Bilozerka memorial was the site of the 2018 ceremony mentioned in chapter 2 as a typical example of a hybrid yet respectful commemorative ceremony involving participants from Russia. One of the Russian videos shows an excur-

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32 Photos from 2017 show the monument in good condition, with recent paint and a wreath in the colors of the Ukrainian flag: "Pamiatnik tank T-34-85 na postamente v g. Berislav," *Shukach*, June 14, 2017, https://www.shukach.com/ru/node/56606.

33 Interviewed by Mykola Homanyuk on April 28, 2023, Andrii Bohdan, the mayor of Horodnia, Chernihiv region, recalled the surprise of an official of a Russian intelligence agency when he found out that all Great Patriotic War memorials in the municipality were not only in place but were in fact well maintained.

34 "Sotrudniki Rosgardii [*sic*] v Khersonskoi oblasti privodiat v poriadok memorialy, posviashchennye podvigu sovetskikh soldat v gody VOV," *Pervyi kanal*, April 16, 2022, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2022-04-16/426620-sotrudniki_rosgardii_v_hersons; "V preddverii Dnia Pobedy rosgvardeitsy oblagorazhivaiut memorialy sovetskim voinam v Khersonskoi oblasti," *Dzen*, April 12, 2022, https://dzen.ru/media/uralgvard/v-preddverii-dnia-pobedy-rosgvardeicy-oblagorajivaiut-memorialy-sovetskim-voinam-v-hersonskoi-oblasti-6255519b142a7e6829719cd9. For a similar statement about Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region, see Mamsurov, "Put' k miru." (1:50 in the embedded video).

35 Observations by local resident Anna Moloshnikova.

sion for schoolchildren led by the searcher interviewed four years earlier in the Ukrainian news report; yet later in the same video, one interviewee claims that "for the past eight years they tried to rewrite our history, they tried to change our history. The feats of our ancestors were forgotten."[36] In another episode, the Russian journalist points to a discolored list of names as proof that "for a long time, nobody has taken care of the memorials."[37]

Sometimes, however, all that is needed to debunk a Russian claim is to study the very materials provided as evidence of new Russian care after years of Ukrainian neglect. Thus, at a memorial in Mordvynivka near Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, a participant in a ceremony to rebury the recently discovered bones of dead Red Army soldiers was shown claiming that no such ceremonies had been possible under Ukrainian rule—against the backdrop of recent graves with Ukrainian-language inscriptions.[38] A similar ceremony in Milove, Luhans'k region, took place at a memorial that had been renovated at considerable cost as recently as 2021 under a nationwide program of restoring cultural heritage sites initiated by President Volodymyr Zelens'kyi.[39] A video of a worker polishing the base of an eternal flame in Vovchans'k, Kharkiv region, also shows that the memorial was already in excellent shape, with previously planted flowers in full bloom.[40]

Complaints about real or imagined Ukrainian bans were also frequent at military commemoration events other than Victory Day. In Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, participants in a May 28 event for the Soviet-era Border Guard Day were filmed presenting a litany of grievances about being prevented by the Ukrainian authorities from displaying Soviet symbols and about the celebration having been moved to a different date by the Ukrainian state.[41] At a June 22 ceremony in the same city, an old man holding a red banner[42] was recorded claiming that during an unspecified

36 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6665, May 4, 2022, 2:14.

37 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6662, May 4, 2022, 0:40.

38 https://t.me/NewsKhersonLife/1240, May 7, 2022; https://t.me/vezhlivo_ru/8682, May 8, 2022; "Rabotniki melovskoi prokuratury pochtili pamiat' pogibshikh v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, March 17, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/rabotniki-melovskoj-prokuratury-pochtili-pamyat-pogibshih-v-gody-velikoj-otechestvennoj-vojny.

39 "U merezhi pokazaly."

40 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6686, May 5, 2022. We thank Petra Hudek for helping us to identify the location, which is not named in the video.

41 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7821, May 28, 2022; Mamsurov, "Put' k miru" 6:10.

42 The red flag displaying a yellow five-pointed star in the middle is sometimes called the "flag of the Red Army" in Western publications but was in fact a simplified generic version of army unit banners, especially those of the so-called guard units created in 1941.

event under Ukrainian rule his flag was trampled upon, he was looked upon with hatred, and a friend was brutally detained. His words were then further radicalized in a newspaper article that misquoted him as saying that "Nazis" had trampled his "Victory banner."[43] Also in Melitopol', Russian officials opening a monument to a Soviet KGB colonel who died in Afghanistan proclaimed that "the Ukrainian Nazi authorities tried to erase from our memory everything connected to our heroes,"[44] implying that veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war were not memorialized in Ukraine despite the countless prominent memorials to them built in the post-Soviet period. In Rozivka, in the same region, a participant in a commemorative ceremony for the 799th anniversary of the Battle of the Kalka River claimed that no such ceremonies had been possible there "for eight years" (since the "coup").[45] Yet a reenactment festival to celebrate the battle had been taking place both before and after 2014, already anachronistically referencing "Cossacks" as participants in the medieval battle just as the Russian-sponsored ceremony of 2022 would.[46]

Like Victory Day celebrations and associated rituals across post-Soviet space, the care of monuments was typically presented as an effort to follow the precepts of the generation that fought in the Great Patriotic War, as well as an effort to pass on their tradition to one's own children. The activist featured in the Beryslav video claimed that he was "doing all of this for the children. For my son, for the rising generation that will pick up the wreath of the common fate of our great people going forward."[47]

Yet the supposedly traditional Soviet symbols and rituals that the occupiers and their collaborators claimed Ukraine had banned are in fact the result of a post-Soviet syncretism that draws on Soviet, Russian nationalist or imperial, and religious sources. While similar syncretization pro-

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See Russian Centre of Vexillology and Heraldry, "Armeiskie znamena i flagi VVS SSSR," June 22, 2019, http://www.vexillographia.ru/russia/USSRarmy.htm.

43 "Pamiat' pavshikh khranim," *Tavricheskie vesti*, June 20–29, 2022.

44 "V Melitopole otkryli pamiatnik rukovoditeliu shturma dvortsa Amina Georgiiu Boiarinovu," *TASS*, November 19, 2022, https://tass.ru/obschestvo/16375391.

45 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834, May 29, 2022, 2:33.

46 "V zaporozhskikh stepiakh kazaki iz byvshikh stran SSSR srazhalis' za chest' Il'i Muromtsa, Dobryni Nikiticha i Aleshy [sic] Popovicha," *Vgorode*, May 30, 2011, https://zp.vgorode.ua/news/sobytyia/57680; Anna Dorokhova, Anna Trubitsyna, and Aleksei Pavliuk, "Fol'klornyi festival' na Kamennykh mogilakh," *Mariupol'skoe televidenie*, June 6, 2016, https://web.archive.org/web/20160814030020/http://www.mariupolskoe.tv/news/news-story/fol-klorny-j-festival-na-kamenny-h-mogilah/.

47 https://t.me/shot_shot/39151, May 4, 2022.

cesses have been at work in post-Soviet Ukraine, the occupiers never displayed any awareness of the tension between Orthodox Christian and Bolshevik symbols, or between those associated with the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia. Thus, in the run-up to May 9, the head of the self-declared Luhans'k People's Republic, Leonid Pasichnyk, and the secretary of the General Council of the United Russia party, Andrei Turchak, made the sign of the cross in front of the red star-shaped base of an eternal flame in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region.[48] At a Victory Day ceremony in Tokmak, Zaporizhzhia region, an Orthodox priest exhorted those assembled to "honor the memory of your kin [*rod*], lest your kin die out from the earth.... One must not trample on monuments to fallen warriors, one must not defile churches and monuments as is being done now. You are the children and grandchildren of those who died for faith and fatherland." He then went on to call the St. George's Ribbon (see chapter 7) a Christian symbol that is being banned by the Ukrainians and to sing the 1975 Soviet song *Den' Pobedy* (Victory Day).[49] In Skadovs'k, Kherson region, an old man (known locally as a currency speculator[50]) interviewed for a propaganda video mentions that he would have loved to place flowers at the feet of the (removed) Lenin statue and thanks the Russian soldiers for their "divine help."[51] In November 2022, the new Kherson-based propaganda TV channel *Tavriia* showed a feature about the reburial of WWII-era soldiers' remains in Kakhovka, Kherson region. Footage of a casket draped in a Soviet flag with a large hammer-and-symbol sickle being lowered into a grave was accompanied with the words "The reburial took place in strict observance of Christian custom."[52]

Indeed, the process of mixing commemorative symbols into new combinations has continued during the Russian invasion. Thus, the above-

48 "Glava LNR i sekretar' gensoveta partii 'ER' vozlozhili tsvety k Vechnomu ogniu v Starobel'ske," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 3, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/glava-lnr-i-sekretar-gensoveta-partii-er-vozlozhili-cvety-k-vechnomu-ognyu-v-starobel-ske.

49 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zjHhhPXrMA, May 9, 2022 (video no longer available as of March 2023).

50 See "Fraza 'Skadovs'k—tse Ukraïna' iak pryvid dlia vykradennia: druzhynu zamorduvaly, cholovika pobyly," *Mediina initsiatyva za prava liudyny*, October 19, 2022, https://mipl.org.ua/fraza-skadovsk-cze-ukrayina-yak-pryvid-dlya-vykradennya-druzhynu-zamorduvaly-cholovika-pobyly/ and several posts about him in the Facebook group "Skadovsk" at https://www.facebook.com/groups/2564007797159267/.

51 https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022.

52 "Na Allee slavy v Kakhovke proveli zakhoronenie voinov-osvoboditelei vremen VOV," *Lenta novostei Khersona*, November 7, 2022, https://kherson-news.ru/society/2022/11/07/62915.html, 2:05.

Figure 4.1. Reburying the remains of soldiers who died during the Second World War, Memorial of Glory in the village of Mordvynivka, Zaporizhzhia region. The ritual involved an honor guard by the Russian military police with a Soviet flag, a priest asperging the coffins with holy water, a gunfire salute, reenactors, and people standing inside the grave lowering the coffins. A similar ritual took place in the Luhans'k region. Image source: Telegram channel *luzhnyi platsdarm*, https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6783, May 7, 2022.

mentioned reburial ceremony in Mordvynivka, Zaporizhzhia region, involved child-size coffins adorned with pentagrams made of St. George's Ribbons (see figure 4.1).[53]

Rekindling the eternal flame

However, the central element of renovation efforts and the focal point of many ceremonies for Victory Day and other commemorative dates has been the eternal flame. Eternal flames started appearing in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s and became habitual elements of war memorials in the 1960s, following an initial repudiation of this commemorative symbol as bourgeois and un-Bolshevik.[54]

53 https://t.me/NewsKhersonLife/1240, May 7, 2022, at 1:46.

54 Anna Iudkina, "'Ogon' voiny i ogon' mira': pervye 'vechnye ogni' v SSSR," in *Mifologicheskie modeli i ritual'noe povedenie v sovetskom i postsovetskom prostranstve*, ed. Aleksandra Arkhipova (Moscow: RGGU, 2013), 249–57; Anna Iudkina, "'Pamiatnik bez pamiati': pervyi vech-

Figure 4.2. On May 2, 2014, 42 people died in a fire in the House of Trade Unions in Odesa during a pro-Russian demonstration. The image shows a candle lit to commemorate them at a memorial in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, to Teachers Who Died Fighting for the Motherland (in the Great Patriotic War). The memorial's base includes artillery shells filled with "sacred soil from the hero cities: Kyiv, Odesa, Brest, Volgograd, Minsk, Moscow, Leningrad, Sevastopol', Kerch', and Novorossiisk." During the commemorative ceremony, memorial lights were placed at the foot of the monument to spell the word "Odesa." Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *luzhnyi platsdarm* on May 3, 2022, https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6589.

In 2022, the sacral character of eternal flames lit at war memorials was underlined by placing them in a religious context. In offline and online pro-occupation media, the flame as a symbol gained traction on the eve of the highest Orthodox Christian holiday, Easter, which fell on April 24 of that year. On Easter Sunday and the following days, flames lit from the Holy Fire at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem were brought to several occupied cities. For example, they reached Melitopol' and Enerhodar, both in the Zaporizhzhia region, on April 25 and 26, respectively. On April 27, a flame was brought to Kherson, as proxy governor Volodymyr Sal'do claimed, "already through Crimea."[55] Another wave of discussion of the flame symbol occurred a week later, on and around May 2, when occupation newspapers and social media referred to flames from the Trade Union House in Odesa: on that date in 2014, 42 participants of a pro-Russian demonstration died in a fire in the building.[56] In 2022, memorial candles were lit at many Great Patriotic War memorials, often as part of large-

nyi ogon' v SSSR," in *Pamiatnik i prazdnik: Etnografiia Dnia Pobedy*, ed. Mikhail Gabovich [Mischa Gabowitsch] (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020), 124–51.

55 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1404, April 28, 2022.

56 For a detailed bipartisan investigation of the events of May 2, 2014, see the website of the "May 2 Group," https://2maygroup.blogspot.com.

scale commemorative events. Around May 9—Victory Day—flames became ubiquitous. In at least one case (in Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia region), an eternal flame at a war memorial was lit from a wax candle brought from the local Orthodox church.[57] Linking Easter, the Odesa fire, and the Great Patriotic War sanctified and desecularized the Eternal Flame as a symbol of war commemoration. In addition, this use of flames served to inscribe the victims of Ukrainian "Nazism" into the continuity of Second World War-era victims of German Nazism, in keeping with the official Russian interpretation of events in Odesa.

More generally, (re-)kindling eternal flames has been one of the main ways in which the occupiers have staged the restoration of Great Patriotic War memory following its supposed neglect in independent or post-Euromaidan Ukraine. The claim in many cases was that an eternal flame installed at a local memorial had not been lit since 2014 or 2015, that it had been cut off from the gas supply altogether,[58] "put out,"[59] or even "destroyed by the previous administration,"[60] though sometimes they simply stated that it "went out" at a given point in the past.[61]

In other cases, Russians claimed that whereas the eternal flame had only been lit occasionally for special commemorative dates under Ukrainian rule, it would now burn "for eternity."[62] Vitalii Kishkinov, a member of the People's Council of the self-proclaimed LNR, said at a ceremony in Severodonets'k, Luhans'k region in August 2022 that he never would have thought he would have to light an eternal flame since it must burn

57 https://t.me/v_and_z/570, May 8, 2022.

58 For example, in Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region: https://t.me/nkPravda/3207, May 4, 2022; in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region: "V Melitopole zazhgli Vechnyi ogon'. Seti: 'Teper' budet goret' vechno!,'" IA Regnum, March 31, 2022, https://regnum.ru/article/3550549.html; in Volnovakha and Urzuf, Donets'k region: "V osvobozhdennykh Volnovakhe i Urzufe vpervye za vosem' let zazhgli Vechnyi ogon'," *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 9, 2022, https://dan-news.ru/obschestvo/v-osvobozhdennyh-volnovahe-i-urzufe-vpervye-za-vosem-let-zazhgli-vechnyj-ogon/; "Obshchestvenniki proverili sostoianie memorialov s Vechnym ognem v trekh osvobozhdennykh punktakh," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 20, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/obshestvenniki-proverili-sostoyanie-memorialov-s-vechnym-ognem-v-treh-osvobozhdennyh-punktah.

59 Egortsev, *Den' Pobedy na Dnepre*, 7:45.

60 Energodar (rezerv), "Energodar. Pamiatniki obretaiut svoi istorichesskii [sic] vid!!" Youtube video, 1:02, April 29, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORoZKR8iCm8.

61 "Rabotniki prokuratury v Novopskove zazhgli Vechnyi ogon' u memoriala pavshim voinam," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 14, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/rabotniki-prokuratury-v-novopskove-zazhgli-vechnyj-ogon-u-memoriala-pavshim-voinam.

62 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6722, May 6, 2022, 0:45; "V Melitopole zazhgli Vechnyi ogon'."

Figure 4.3. Eternal Glory monument at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Kyiv. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, May 2023.

all the time.[63] Such statements are misleading on several counts. Lighting eternal flames only for special occasions is quite common across Russia as well as in places controlled by the self-proclaimed people's republics since 2014.[64] In addition, there are several permanently lit eternal flames in Ukraine (see figure 4.3).[65]

In some cases, the occupiers proudly reported the installation of new eternal flames where none had existed.[66] In at least one case, a flame was renovated in time for Victory Day, even though this meant dismantling part of the memorial that contained it.[67]

In many Russian propaganda videos, eternal flames were lit by (often camouflaged) Russian soldiers, thus staging a military-supported "return to normal." In addition, however, Russian proxy officials often made an appearance at such lighting ceremonies, hoping to draw legitimacy from the performance.[68] A number of organizations and prominent individ-

63 https://t.me/Letnab22/1284, August 30, 2022.

64 For example, in Alchevs'k, Luhans'k region: "Zazhzhenie Vechnogo ognia u memoriala sovetskim voinam sostoialos' v Alchevske," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 19, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/zazhzhenie-vechnogo-ognya-u-memoriala-sovetskim-voinam-sostoyalos-v-alchevske. On eternal flames in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, see Iudkina, "'Pamiatnik bez pamiati.'"

65 See, for example, on war memorials in Kyiv, Odesa, Mykolaïv, and Poltava as well as at a decommunized memorial to the October Revolution in central Kharkiv.

66 See, for example, in Volnovakha, Donets'k region: "V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik Voinam-osvoboditeliam i memorial 'Zhertvam fashizma,'" *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 15, 2022, https://dan-news.ru/culture/v-volnovahe-vosstanovili-pamjatnik-voinam-osvoboditeljam-i-memorial-zhertvam/?lang=ru.

67 Photographic evidence provided by Alla Krymchenkova, Kakhovka.

68 For examples from the Donets'k and Luhans'k regions, see "Glava DNR zazheg vechnyi ogon' v osvobozhdennom Mariupole," *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 9, 2022, https://dan-news.ru/obschestvo/glava-dnr-zazheg-vechnyj-ogon-v-osvobozhdennom-mariupole/?lang=ru; "Spiker parlamenta DNR prinial uchastie v zazhzhenii Vechnogo ognia v osvobozhdennom Mangushe," *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 9, 2022, https://

uals specialized in attending to eternal flames throughout the occupied territories. The Russian rock singer Iuliia Chicherina toured the region, lighting eternal flames at Great Patriotic War memorials for the cameras.[69] Government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) such as *Peace to the Luhans'k Region* carried out much-publicized "monitorings" of the state of eternal flames in the "liberated" territories.[70]

Along with rituals that brought local commemorative calendars in sync with Russian ones, ceremonies involving the eternal flame were among the main practices symbolically linking the occupied territories with the Russian homeland, with the fire used to light the flames brought from important sites in Russia.[71] The importance of the eternal flame in symbolizing the restoration of "proper" war memory also created the paradoxical practice of installing "temporary eternal flames" or using portable flames, or even oil lamps, in places without a permanent gas supply.[72] Incidentally, oil lamps had already been in use in Ukraine as commemorative symbols before 2022.

In addition, eternal flames were also used to highlight the industrial heritage that is so important to Russian views of the Donbas and more generally of the Soviet past. In his above-mentioned speech in Severodonets'k, Kishkinov stressed the fact that the eternal flame was "the first object starting to live and breathe" on the day Russia reconnected the city to its gas supply—echoing the connection between war memory and the achievements of the Soviet gas industry that has been drawn regularly since the first known eternal flame was installed by the director of a gas

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dan-news.ru/obschestvo/spiker-parlamenta-dnr-prinjal-uchastie-v-zazhzhenii-vechnogo-ognja-v-osvobozhdennom/?lang=ru; "V osvobozhdennykh Volnovakhe i Urzufe." In Kherson, on April 12, 2022, members of the proxy Committee for the Salvation of Kherson simply rekindled the eternal flame in the Park of Glory and removed the Ukrainian flag from the adjacent flagpole (Mykola Homanyuk's field observations).

69 See, for example, https://t.me/zaborzp/15982, April 22, 2022.

70 "'Mir Luganshchine' provedet aktsiiu 'Ogon' Pobedy,'" *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 16, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/mir-luganshine-provedet-akciyu-ogon-pobedy; "Obshchestvenniki proverili"; "Sostoianie voinskikh memorialov s Vechnym ognëm proverili aktivisty OD 'Mir Luganshchine' na osvobozhdënnykh territoriiakh LNR," *Mir Luganshchine* (blog), April 30, 2022, https://mir-lug.info/novosti-proektov/sostoyanie-voinskih-memorialov-s-vechnym-ognyom-proverili-aktivisty-od-mir-luganshhine-na-osvobozhdyonnyh-territoriyah-lnr/.

71 "Volontery ONF zazhgli ogon' pamiati na vosstanovlennoi bratskoi mogile v Schast'e," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 8, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/volontery-onf-zazgli-ogon-pamati-na-vosstanovlennoj-bratskoj-mogile-v-scast-e.

72 For temporary eternal flames, see "V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik." For oil lamps, see "Volontery ONF zazhgli ogon' pamiati na vosstanovlennoi bratskoi mogile v Schast'e."

plant in the Tula region in the mid-1950s.[73] In 2022, the Russian-appointed administrations sometimes rekindled eternal flames without connection to any particular commemorative date, simply to mark that the gas supply had been restored to their city.[74]

Spurious reconstruction

One of the main tropes of Russian war propaganda concerns Ukraine's supposed neglect of Soviet memorials to the Great Patriotic War. Accordingly, the Russian forces undertook many widely publicized acts of reconstruction or beautification, especially in the run-up to Victory Day. Since most such memorials were actually well maintained, they had to invent creative ways of showcasing improvements.

In some cases, the damage remedied by Russian restoration measures was due to the Russian invasion itself. One example is the T-34 tank monument in Volnovakha, Donets'k region.[75] Another is a supposed "monument to heroes of the Great Patriotic War" that had been left to decay "for eight years," according to a propaganda video that also showed one of the statues from the memorial lying on the ground and designated for re-erection. In fact, the statue had been damaged during the Russian shelling of Mariupol'. Not to mention the fact that the monument, built in 1968, was devoted to the Communist Youth Union (Komsomol) rather than the Great Patriotic War, and while there was a soldier from that war among the three figures symbolizing different periods of Komsomol activity, that statue remained standing.[76] In one case, in Volnovakha district, Donets'k region, a video shows debris being cleared away to make the writing on a monument visible. The debris in question clearly resulted from a botched earlier maintenance attempt.[77] In other cases, removing anti-occupation graffiti was presented as monument maintenance.[78]

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73 Iudkina, "'Pamiatnik bez pamiati.'"

74 For an example in Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/12357, October 31, 2022.

75 "V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik."

76 https://t.me/zvezdanews/78654, May 3, 2022.

77 Igor' Kokhanyi (@kokhanyyigor), "Na osvobozhdennykh territoriiakh ko Dniu Pobedy," Twitter, May 4, 2022, 8:36am, https://twitter.com/kokhanyyigor/status/1521740630753480704.

78 As in a video of the tank monument in Kherson's Park of Glory from April 2022: https://t.me/herson_today/319, April 27, 2022.

Where monuments were in good condition, maintenance was sometimes simply staged for the cameras. Thus, one Russian propaganda video about monument reconstruction in the "liberated" territories shows people engaged in the maintenance of a war memorial in Skadovs'k, Kherson region.[79] Eye-witnesses report that the territory of the memorial was cordoned off by Russian soldiers for 30 minutes, during which a staged maintenance act was performed for Russian TV.[80] In Kherson, an article in a Russian propaganda newspaper reported on a group of young men "brushing up" a monument to the Soviet 295th Rifle Division. The monument had been in excellent condition; following a widespread Soviet and post-Soviet tradition, it had been placed under the patronage of a local school, as documented in a plaque installed on it.[81]

While the existence of such patronage practices in independent Ukraine was never mentioned in Russian propaganda, pro-occupation reporting made a point of underscoring the voluntary nature of monument maintenance efforts under Russian rule. Thus, in the Luhans'k region, a GONGO titled *Sisters of Victory* was supposedly created by local students and composed of the "wives and girlfriends of service members participating in the special operation." The group became infamous for a militaristic cover of the *Wellerman* shanty released online in April and swiftly parodied,[82] but its brand was also used in reports about monument maintenance in the occupied territories along with other groups intended to confer local legitimacy, such as a "tourism and local history circle" in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region.[83]

Apart from eternal flames (see previous section) and Victory Banners (discussed in chapter 7), the main symbol of the restoration of Great Patriotic War memory has been paint.

"Paint wars" surrounding monuments have a long-standing tradition in the post-socialist countries. The Pink Tank in Prague and the Soviet war memorial in central Sofia are internationally known examples of monu-

79 https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022, at 2:16

80 Personal communication from two Skadovs'k residents.

81 "Dan' pamiati."

82 For the original song and quote, see https://vk.com/wall-50332460_2917473, April 20, 2022; parody: Razgovornyi zhanr, "Pikuli–Parodiia na pesniu soldatskikh zhen," Youtube video, 2:31, September 20, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okQUFFwMXgo.

83 "'Sestry Pobedy' i turisty-kraevedy proveli subbotnik u pamiatnika na Starobel'shchine," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 7, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/sestry-pobedy-i-turisty-kraevedy-proveli-subbotnik-u-pamyatnika-na-starobel-shine.

ments to Soviet soldiers that have repeatedly been painted and scrubbed clean to send various political messages. In Ukraine, such conflicts have typically involved the colors of the Ukrainian and Russian flags. Thus, in 2015, the city authorities of Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region, had a Great Patriotic War memorial in the city center repainted blue and yellow before Victory Day instead of the yellow and black colors of a Tsarist and Soviet era military distinction.[84] Conversely, in Kakhovka, Kherson region, in July 2018, someone painted the Russian tricolor on the pedestal of a monument to "victims of fascism."[85]

Following the Russian invasion, the occupiers "restored" the Enerhodar memorial by repainting it, though they chose the black-and-orange colors of the post-Soviet St. George's Ribbon instead of the previous black and yellow.[86] The stele of another Great Patriotic War memorial, located in a wooded part of Enerhodar, was also painted in the same colors, even though it had been monochrome before.[87]

One particularly intriguing aspect of the use of paint in spurious reconstruction concerns the occupiers' interaction with the polychromy of rural war memorials discussed in chapter 2. In our overview of *blahoustrii* practices in that chapter, we mentioned how applying monochrome paint is a long-standing tradition that protects such monuments from the effects of weather and is usually done in preparation for Victory Day or some other commemorative celebrations. This practice of renewing paint was continued under the occupation.

In at least one case, this involved reverting from polychromy back to monochromy. In Volnovakha, Donets'k region, a memorial to "victims of fascism" showing the figures of a soldier and emaciated civilian had been turned polychrome in recent years, with a photograph from 2018 showing these figures painted green, with the soldier's rifle black and his medals and belt buckle gold.[88] For Victory Day 2022, the occupiers had the entire

84 "Na obnovlennyi memorial v Energodare burno otreagirovali v sotssetiakh," *Zaporozh'e: Gorodskoi portal*, April 28, 2015, https://misto.zp.ua/article/partners/na-obnovlennyy-memorial-v-energodare-burno-otreagirovali-v-socsetyakh_18534.html.

85 "Na iuge Ukrainy neizvestnye razrisovali pamiatnik v rossiiskii trikolor," *Versiia*, July 15, 2018, https://versiya.info/v-mire/76310.

86 "Energodar. Pamiatniki obretaiut svoi istorichesskii [sic] vid!!"; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6353, April 28, 2022.

87 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6353, April 28, 2022.

88 "Bratskaia mogila sovetskikh voinov v Letnem parke g. Volnovakhi," *Shukach*, July 31, 2018, https://www.shukach.com/ru/node/64032.

Figure 4.4. Victory Day concert at the memorial to Victims of Fascism in Volnovakha, Donets'k region. The monument has been turned monochrome again (compare figure 2.9). Image source: *Donets'koe agentstvo novostei,* May 15, 2022, https://dan-news.ru/culture/v-volnovahe-vosstanovili-pamjatnik-voinam-osvoboditeljam-i-memorial-zhertvam.

monument, including its concrete base and back wall, painted a monotonous gray to serve as backdrop for a concert by four girls in Red Army-style sidecaps and skirts (figure 4.4).[89]

Often, however, the occupation, under the guise of renovating memorials after a supposed period of neglect, amplified the practice of polychromy or let it run wild rather than suppressing it. Monuments continued to be given new coats of paint regardless of their materials or the sculptors' original intentions, often using different colors to highlight different elements of a statue or monument, for example, by painting the boots of a soldier statue black or the colors on bas-relief soldiers' helmets red.[90] In Heniches'k, Kherson region, a concrete soldier statue repainted in a comic-book gray-and-olive color scheme was presented as evidence of "specialist" restoration and that "concerned citizens are so carefully looking after objects of cultural heritage."[91] Official patronage for this resto-

89 "V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik."

90 Both examples are in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region. See https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/9046, July 1, 2022; "V Melitopole vosstanovili memorial sovetskim voinam," *RIA Novosti Krym*, July 23, 2022, https://crimea.ria.ru/20220723/v-melitopole-vosstanovili-memorial-sovetskim-voinam--video-1123940725.html. For several more examples from different parts of the occupied territories, see https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022, for example, at 3:30 and 4:10.

91 https://t.me/tavria_kherson/2446, October 30, 2022; "V Genicheske vosstanovili pamiatnik soldatam Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny," *ZOV Kherson*, October 31, 2022, https://kherson-news.ru/other/2022/10/31/59893.html.

Figure 4.5. Painting letters on the pedestal of a monument to General Marhelov in Kherson. In the occupied territories, gold paint was widely used to paint both metal and engraved letters on the bases of monuments. Non-painted letters were demonstrated as evidence that monuments in independent Ukraine were not taken care of. Screenshot from a video posted by the Telegram channel *Iuzhnyi platsdarm*, June 26, 2022, t.me/yug_plazdarm/8759.

ration was provided by a number of Russian political organizations, even though Russians had earlier been scandalized by such practices when they encountered them, for example, in occupied Crimea.[92]

Another popular mode of "renovation" has been to paint letters gold (see figure 4.5).[93] One memorial in the village of Zaporiz'ke, Luhans'k region, was repainted using a gray, white, red, and turquoise color scheme.[94] In Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, a soldier statue that is part of a monument to a local regiment was painted to look like a wax figure wearing a gray trench coat.[95] In Pershozvanivka, Luhans'k region, beautification involved

92 "V Krymu porozoveli voennye pamiatniki," *Lenta novostei Kryma*, August 6, 2015, https://crimea-news.com/society/2015/06/08/95533.html.

93 As in the case of the main Great Patriotic War memorial in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region ("Vozvrashchenie domoi.") or a monument in Kherson to the 295th Rifle Division (Mykola Homanyuk's observations and photos and "Dan' pamiati.").

94 "Deputaty Narodnogo Soveta LNR i zhiteli Starobel'shchiny blagoustroili memorial s Vechnym ognem," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 29, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/deputaty-narodnogo-soveta-lnr-i-zhiteli-starobel-shiny-blagoustroili-memorial-s-vechnym-ognem.

95 For a photo, see https://storage.lug-info.com/cache/3/3/acaf05a5-b382-4455-86a2-1b8234ccdd47.jpg/w1000h616, included in: "Torzhestvennoe zazhzhenie privezennogo iz Moskvy Vechnogo ognia sostoialos' v Starobel'ske," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, May 9, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/torzhestvennoe-zazhzhenie-privezennogo-iz-moskvy-vechnogo-ognya-sostoyalos-v-starobel-ske.

Figure 4.6. Monument to "Internationalist warriors who fell in Afghanistan and other global hot spots," Kherson. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, August 2022.

painting large red carnations with green stems on a Great Patriotic War memorial.[96] The star-shaped base of an eternal flame in Lazurne, Kherson region, was repainted red.[97]

Even bronze statues, intended to develop a patina, have not been exempt from such painting. In Kherson's Park of Glory, two statues built in post-Soviet Ukraine commemorate local soldiers who died during the Soviet campaigns in Afghanistan and elsewhere: a bronze statue from 1999 shows a kneeling mother holding an icon, while a bronze-like polymer statue from 2013 depicts a sitting soldier. In July and August 2022, the Russian-led youth organization "Young Builders of Kherson" painted both monuments in multiple colors, for example, using gold paint for the icon (see figure 4.6).[98] (In other cases, bronze or brass monuments were sanded or rasped rather than painted to produce similar effects, as in the case of a high-relief brass portrait of Kherson partisan Omelian Hirs'kyi. Installed on a wall in a street named after him, in September 2022, the portrait was filed to make the face and hair appear in different colors.[99])

These repainting performances are typically presented as community get-togethers in the style of the Soviet-era *subbotnik*s—formally voluntary days of unpaid work, often to clean streets or monuments.[100] Rather than

96 "Lutuginskie aktivisty priveli v poriadok bratskuiu mogilu i stelu v sele Pervozvanovka," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 28, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/lutuginskie-aktivisty-priveli-v-poryadok-bratskuyu-mogilu-i-stelu-v-sele-pervozvanovka.

97 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1674, May 5, 2022.

98 "Volontery obshchestvennoi organizatsii 'Molodye stroiteli Khersona' obnovili pamiatnik voinam-internatsionalistam v Parke Slavy," *Lenta novostei Khersona*, July 28, 2022, https://kherson-news.ru/society/2022/07/28/16837.html; https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3139, September 3, 2022.

99 Observations and photo by Mykola Homanyuk.

100 For examples, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8617, June 21, 2022; "Deputaty Narodnogo Soveta LNR"; "'Sestry Pobedy' i turisty-kraevedy." On the history of *subbotniks* from the times of the Russian Civil War through revivals in the late USSR and post-Soviet coun-

constituting preservation, their primary purpose appears to be to create evidence of respectful interaction with a monument, in the absence of more meaningful forms of such interaction. Videos and photos broadcast on Russian propaganda channels often feature paint buckets, paintbrushes, paint scrapers, cement bags, saws, scaffolding, and other maintenance paraphernalia.[101] The accompanying messages sometimes proudly proclaim that these supplies were provided to local volunteers by the Russian National Guard.[102]

When monuments are repainted in this way, this is often accompanied by the claim that the Ukrainians did it wrong. Thus, in the case of the tank monument in Volnovakha, one occupation news agency trumpeted the fact that a sign of distinction was painted on the tank—even though pre-occupation photos clearly show that that symbol had been there under Ukrainian rule as well, and moreover, the article mixed up the name of the sign.[103] The town's Russian-installed mayor also declared that "under Ukrainian occupation, the monument was maintained in a purely formalistic way; it was painted in a single color."[104] The Russian side chose particularly vivid colors instead. In any case, if any of the occupiers had been scandalized by polychromy, whatever countermeasures they put in place were forgotten as their attention shifted away from memorials. Simply letting locals do what they had always done while presenting it as a Russian-enabled practice was a cheap way of boasting about monument maintenance while limiting the resources spent on it.

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tries, see Olga Golechkova and Olga Chagadaeva, "Subbotniks: From the Great to the Meaningless (the Evolution of the Soviet Labor Phenomenon)," *Labor History* 62, no. 2 (2021): 148–65; M.O. Piskunov and T.N. Rakov, "Pozdnesovetskie subbotniki: ot produktivistskoi utopii k ritualam politicheskoi loial'nosti," *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta: Istoriia*, no. 73 (2021): 31–40; M.O. Piskunov and T.N. Rakov, "Kommunisticheskii trud? Subbotnik mezhdu pozdnesovetskim ritualom i ekologicheskoi praktikoi," *Vestnik Surgutskogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta* 6 (2021): 113–20; Francisco Martínez, *Remains of the Soviet Past in Estonia: An Anthropology of Forgetting, Repair and Urban Traces* (London: UCL Press, 2018), 227–29.

101 For examples, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6402, April 29, 2022; "Energodar. Pamiatniki obretaiut svoi istorichesskii [sic] vid!!," 0:50; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6322, April 27, 2022; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/9295, July 9, 2022; Kokhanyi, "Na osvobozhennykh territoriiakh."

102 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6256, April 26, 2022.

103 For a news report on this subject, see "V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik." For photos, see "Pamiatnik iz Volnovakhi," June 20, 2022, https://tankist-31.livejournal.com/400961.html. The article mentions the Order of the Red Banner, even though the symbol in question was the Sign of the Soviet Guards.

104 "V Volnovakhe vosstanovili pamiatnik."

Yet while turning once-monochrome war memorials multi-colored is a continuation of recent Ukrainian practice, presenting this vernacular custom as a return to normal and trumpeting it in propaganda videos paradoxically gives it a stamp of official (Russian) approval, in keeping with the age-old Soviet and Russian tradition of integrating locally developed practices into the state's commemorative repertoire.[105]

Monuments as sites of reeducation

The occupiers were not content with demonstrating how the Russian troops took care of Soviet war memorials and unleashed the energies of volunteers who had been yearning to maintain monuments but feared Ukrainian reprisals. They also presented memorial modification and maintenance as a form of punishment or as a reeducation measure allowing former nationalists to redeem themselves.

Forcing locals to alter a symbolic landscape after a political takeover is a form of humiliation with a long pedigree. After the German annexation of Austria in March 1938, the Nazis forced Jews (and, occasionally, political opponents) to wash off anti-annexation slogans from city streets in what became known as "scrubbing parties," radicalizing earlier measures by the Dollfuß and Schuschnigg governments who had forced local Nazis to wash off pro-German National Socialist slogans.[106]

In the Soviet tradition, however, such measures were typically presented as forms of reeducation rather than mere punishment. Thus, the idea of caring for soldiers' graves and memorials as a way of educating both children and adults in the correct ideology developed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. After 1945, the Soviet civilian and military authorities in territories formerly occupied by the Germans not only organized patriotic education events around war memorials for pupils. They also expected local residents, especially in Ukrainian and

105 Mischa Gabowitsch, "Are Copycats Subversive? Strategy-31, the Russian Runs, the Immortal Regiment, and the Transformative Potential of Non-Hierarchical Movements," *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 5 (2018): 308–10; Gabowitsch, "Victory Day before the Cult."

106 Michaela Scharf, "Dokumentation und Demütigung. Judenverfolgung in Amateurfilmen aus dem nationalsozialistischen Wien 1938," *Visual History: Online-Nachschlagewerk für die historische Bildforschung*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok-2180; G. E. R. Gedye, *Fallen Bastions: The Central European Tragedy* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), 308.

Belarusian villages, to actively maintain the communal graves of Red Army soldiers, not least as a way of training them in the official narratives of liberation which masked the considerable complexity of actual wartime events. Administrative reports from this era preserved in the Kyiv party archive amply document locals' reluctance to participate in such activities; few of them identified with soldiers from far-flung parts of the Soviet Union, and people were more interested in rebuilding their own dwellings and scrambling to survive in the hunger years of the postwar period.[107] This early postwar practice of mandatory monument maintenance has largely been erased from post-Soviet commemorative culture: under Brezhnev, interest in building and maintaining war memorials spread unionwide, and the new two-day weekend led to a revival of the old *subbotnik* tradition. Monument-related practices became intergenerational affairs which no longer relied as thoroughly on state policing as they did before.

During the 2022 occupation, the Russians repeatedly staged performances of atonement through interaction with monuments. In the above-quoted video from Beryslav, Kherson region, where a local activist spoke of the "degradation of the population," the end of the degradation was symbolized by a masked Russian soldier forcing a group of alleged Ukrainian ATO veterans with shovels to "beautify" the monument in order "to expiate your sins against our ancestors" (see figure 4.7).[108] A propaganda video from Kherson showed Volodymyr Mykolaienko, the city's deposed mayor, being forced to look up at the Victory Banner hoisted on a flagpole and asked to disown the twentieth-century Ukrainian nationalist leader and war criminal Roman Shukhevych.[109]

Destroying Ukrainian monuments could likewise be portrayed as a form of penitence or punishment. On April 10, 2022, according to eyewitnesses, passersby were forcibly enlisted to remove flags and portraits from the Heavenly Hundred monument in central Kherson.[110] In

107 See, for example, this report from 1956 on the state of World War II cemeteries and communal graves in Ukraine: Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine (TsDAHOU), f. 1, o. 24, spr. 4254, a. 155–160. See also Robert Dale, "Remobilizing the Dead: Wartime and Postwar Soviet Burial Practices and the Construction of the Memory of the Great Patriotic War," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 22, no. 1 (2021): 41–73.

108 https://t.me/shot_shot/39151, May 4, 2022.

109 https://t.me/ssternenko/5217, May 3, 2022.

110 This took place on the corner of Ushakova and Perekops'ka Streets. See https://t.me/kherson_non_fake/694, April 11, 2022.

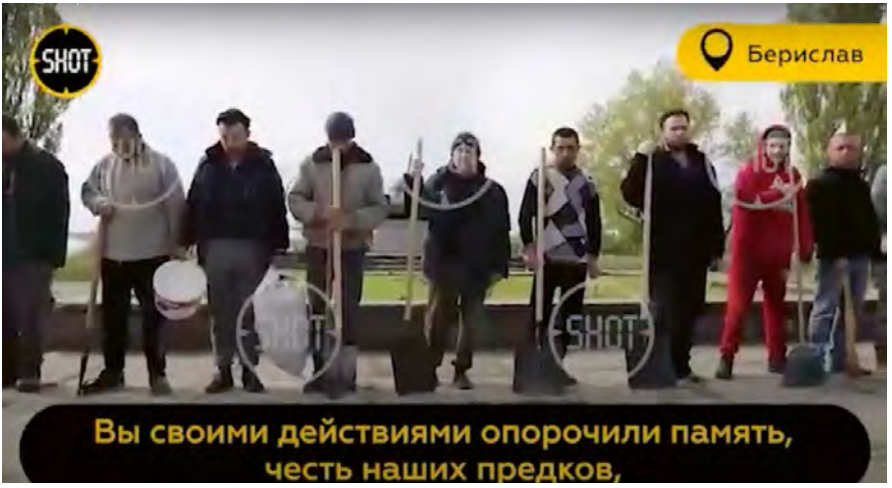

Figure 4.7. Beautification of the area around the Monument to the Liberator Soldiers from the Grateful Residents of Beryslav (Kherson region). A man wearing a Russian army uniform presents the lined up men as Anti-Terrorist Operation participants and says that they "besmirched the memory of their ancestors who fought for our motherland in the years of the Great Patriotic War." Screenshot from a video posted by the Telegram channel *Shot*, May 4, 2022, t.me/shot_shot/39151.

the above-mentioned case of a supposed former member of the Territorial Defense blowing up an ATO monument, the narrative of a regular local resident awakening from Ukrainian nationalist propaganda was central to the video's message. In another case, a Russian proxy official simply showed a destroyed ATO monument, claiming that it had been demolished by repentant ATO veterans.[111]

Finally, those caught tampering with Great Patriotic War symbols that had been repurposed in support of the occupation were also sometimes made to engage in rituals of public repentance. In June 2022, a man previously recorded violently tearing down a Russian-hoisted Victory Banner from a flagpole in Enerhodar (see chapter 6) was then filmed making a confession: visibly intimidated, he stated that he had simply wanted to preserve the banner as a souvenir in honor of his relatives who fought in the Great Patriotic War and was also shown hoisting a Russian flag on the same flagpole.[112]

111 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1169, April 21, 2022.

112 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8566, June 19, 2022. See also "Zhitel' Energodara raskaialsia v sniatii Znameni Pobedy i podnial Trikolor," *Tavricheskie vesti*, June 29, 2022.

Other modes of commemoration as reeducation were not actually employed by the Russians, but their threat still haunted Ukrainians. In August 2014, following the initial invasion, the government of the self-proclaimed Donets'k People's Republic staged a "prisoners' parade," marching captured Ukrainian soldiers with tied hands through Donets'k accompanied by insults and attacks by passersby.[113] Organized in direct contravention of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949, the event was a deliberate reenactment of the "Parade of the Vanquished" in July 1944, in which over 50,000 German prisoners of war were marched through Moscow (itself an implicit restaging of smaller parades of German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war in Petrograd and Moscow in 1914–15). Rumors of plans for a similar event to be held on Victory Day in Mariupol' or Rostov-on-Don circulated in the spring of 2022, but nothing of the sort materialized.[114]

Monuments built

The occupation administrations also initiated the construction of a number of entirely new monuments. Some of these were intended to commemorate the invasion itself in ways echoing Soviet monuments to the liberation of territories from Nazi occupiers. A block of granite newly placed in an avenue in Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region, was adorned with a plaque

113 Dzherri Toms, "'Parad plennykh': Kak gorod Donetsk stal chuzhim," *Radio Svoboda*, January 13, 2015, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/26791829.html.

114 Nastoiashchee vremia (@CurrentTimeTv), "V ponedel'nik liudiam, kotorye nakhodiatsia v fil'tratsionnoi tiur'me v sele Bezymennoe, stali govorit', chto 'skoree vsego na 9 maia my pereodenem vas v voennuiu formu, otvezem v Mariupol', proidetes' tam paradom plennykh,'—rasskazyvaet sovetnik mera Mariupolia Petr Andriushchenko," Twitter, May 6, 2022, 9:32am (https://twitter.com/CurrentTimeTv/status/1522479360594395136; Lesia Vasylenko (@lesiavasylenko), "#Russia prepares a POW parade for 09/05. This is where they bring Ukrainian prisoners out on the streets for Russians to jeer and throw garbage at them. A true demonstration of total disregard for Geneva Conventions," Twitter, May 7, 2022, 8:16am, https://twitter.com/lesiavasylenko/status/1522822750951333888; Igor Sushko (@igorsushko), "URGENT: According to our sources, Kremlin is evaluating the question of forcing the participation of more than 500 Ukrainian prisoners of war in the 'Victory Parade,' (May 9th) the Ukrainians POWs would be paraded in front of the shocked public. (2022 Parade practice photos)," Twitter, May 2, 2022, 7:17am, https://twitter.com/igorsushko/status/1520995910490247168; "NEPRAVDA: Video parada plennykh ukrainskikh soldat v Rostove v 2022 godu," *Vox Ukraine*, May 12, 2022, https://voxukraine.org/ru/nepravda-vydeo-parada-plennyh-ukraynskyh-soldat-v-rostove-v-2022-godu.

saying, "A monument to the Russian liberator soldier will be installed here."[115] In devastated Mariupol', Donets'k region, politicians from Russia and the self-proclaimed DNR in early May presided over the opening of a polymer statue, with a bronze-colored finish, of an elderly lady holding a (real) Soviet flag.[116] The motif was based on the distorted story of the real-life case of Anna Ivanova, a resident of a rural suburb of Kharkiv who greeted Ukrainian soldiers with a red flag in early April 2022. Although she had seen her action as a sign of peace, the Russian media then falsely cast it as a gesture of support for the Russian invasion and turned her into a pro-war icon.[117]

A related set of memorial markers in the newly occupied territories commemorated Russians or their supporters who died during the invasion. Those with local credentials were often singled out for particularly conspicuous and speedy commemoration. This is exemplified by Volodymyr Zhoha, a separatist battalion commander who died in action in Volnovakha, Donets'k region, in March 2022, aged 29. The Russian and proxy authorities posthumously named him a Hero of Russia and Hero of the Donets'k People's Republic and renamed several streets and squares after him both in Russia and in the occupied territories. A bust of Zhoha was unveiled in Donets'k's Avenue of Heroes in May and another one in October in central Volnovakha, in a square renamed after him.[118] In November 2022, Kyrylo Stremousov, the Russian-appointed deputy governor of Kherson region, died in a car accident. A mere six

115 "Berdians'k: okupanty planuiut' vstanovyty pam'iatnyk 'rosiis'komu soldatu-vyzvolyteliu,'" *Radio Svoboda*, June 14, 2022, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/berdyansk-okupanti-pamyatnyk-rosiyskomu-soldatu-vyzvolytelyu/31897115.html; Lina Korsak, "Zhitel' Berdianska rasskazal, pochemu povesil doma portret Shoigu," *MK*, August 24, 2022, https://www.mk.ru/politics/2022/08/24/zhitel-berdyanska-rasskazal-pochemu-povesil-doma-portret-shoygu.html.

116 "V Mariupole poiavilsia pamiatnik babushke, vyshedshei k boevikam s flagom SSSR," *RIA Novosti*, May 5, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220505/babushka-1786898211.html.

117 Sofia Bettiza and Svyatoslav Khomenko, "Babushka Z: The Woman Who Became a Russian Propaganda Icon," *BBC News*, June 15, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61757667.

118 "Pamiatnik Geroiu Rossii Vladimiru Zhoge otkryli v Volnovakhe," *RIA Novosti*, October 14, 2022, https://ria.ru/20221014/zhoga-1824008157.html; "V Donetske uvekovechili pamiat' Geroia Rossii i DNR Vladimira Zhogi," *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, May 26, 2022, https://dan-news.ru/stories/v-donecke-uvekovechili-pamjat-geroja-rossii-i-dnr-vladimira-zhogi/?lang=ru; "V okkupirovannoi Volnovakhe otkryt 'pamiatnik' odnomu iz voennykh prestupnikov."

days later, a plaque commemorating him was installed in the village of Novoluhans'ke, Donets'k region, on the building where he went to school.[119]

Other new monuments referenced the Soviet period. Some simply focused on the Great Patriotic War; thus, on December 9, 2022, the Russian-appointed administration of Heniches'k, Kherson region, opened a mural to a locally born hero of that war.[120] However, since the landscape of Great Patriotic War commemoration was already quite saturated, the occupiers expanded their scope to include other events and figures from the Soviet era. For example, the occupation administration in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, was particularly active in memorializing Soviet-era secret service members. In July 2022, they unveiled a bust of Pavel Sudoplatov, a Soviet spy born in Melitopol' and famous, among other things, for assassinating the Ukrainian nationalist leader Ievhen Konovalets'.[121] In November, they opened a monument to KGB colonel Grigorii Boiarinov, who died while storming Tajbeg Palace in Kabul in December 1979.[122] Born in Russia, Boiarinov's connection to Ukraine was limited to having lived in a village near Melitopol' for a few years during his childhood.

Another set of monuments were devoted to older events that fit the Russian historical narrative about the quintessentially Russian identity of the Ukrainian lands. The themes for these monuments were sometimes chosen out of an obvious desire to obliterate Ukrainian memorials and what they stand for rather than reflecting any great commemorative demand. On August 3, in Freedom Square in Mariupol', Donets'k region, the invaders demolished a memorial installed in 2015 to honor Ukrainian soldiers killed in action.[123] Within just over one month, they replaced it with a large statue of medieval grand prince Aleksandr Nevskii, who had no connection to the area but was presented as "a symbol of Russia's help

119 "V DNR otkryli memorial'nuiu dosku v chest' pogibshego zamgubernatora Khersonshchiny Kirilla Stremousova," *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, November 15, 2022, https://dannews.ru/obschestvo/v-dnr-otkryli-memorialnuju-dosku-v-chest-pogibshego-zamgubernatora-hersonschiny/.

120 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/5286, December 10, 2022.

121 "Biust legendarnomu sovetskomu razvedchiku Pavlu Sudoplatovu ustanovlen v Melitopole," *Diktant Pobedy*, July 7, 2022, https://диктантпобеды.рф/news/1258; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/9243, July 27, 2022.

122 "V Melitopole otkryli pamiatnik."

123 "U Mariupoli RF znosyť memorial zahyblym ukraïns'kym viis'kovym," *Espreso*, August 3, 2022, https://espreso.tv/u-mariupoli-rosiyani-znosyat-memorial-pamyati-zagiblim-ukrainskim-viyskovim.

Figure 4.8. An equestrian statue of Aleksandr Nevskii in Mariupol', Donets'k region. Source: https://www.rbc.ru/politics/18/09/2022/632666499a7947d919c33c47, September 18, 2022.

and protection of all Orthodox people" (see figure 4.8).[124] In Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region, the occupiers removed a marker commemorating ATO soldiers from a memorial and replaced it with one honoring unnamed "Heroes and victims of the First World War."[125] That war is marginal to Russian commemorative culture,[126] and Berdians'k was very far from the main theaters of war. Yet the monument gestured at the presence of German troops in the city in 1918 and at the official Russian view of the Ukrainian-Soviet war of 1917–18 as a foreign occupation of Russian lands, with Ukrainians acting as anti-Russian traitors by allying with Germany, contrasting with the Ukrainian interpretation of the German presence as military aid to Ukraine's ill-fated independence struggle against the Bolsheviks. This was made even more explicit in a Russian propaganda report about a memorial to Civil War-era communist partisans in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, which claims that in 1917, "the Austro-Hungarian boot stepped onto Russian soil at the invitation of the Central Rada of the Ukrainian People's Republic" and insinuates a near-equivalence between the German military occupations of 1918 and 1942, suggesting that the presence of

124 "Zamisť memorialu pamiati zahyblym ukraïns'kym zakhysnykam rosiiany pochaly montuvaty u Mariupoli 'novyi totem,'" *Zmina*, August 19, 2022, https://zmina.info/news/zamist-memorialu-pamyati-zagyblym-ukrayinskym-zahysnykam-rosiyany-pochaly-montuvaty-u-mariupoli-novyj-totem; https://t.me/andriyshTime/2865, September 12, 2022; "Beglov otkryl v Mariupole pamiatnik Aleksandru Nevskomu," *RBK*, September 18, 2022, https://www.rbc.ru/politics/18/09/2022/632666499a7947d919c33c47.

125 "Novosti. V Berdianske otkryli pamiatnik voinam, pogibshim v Pervoi mirovoi voine," *Smotrim*, August 1, 2022, https://smotrim.ru/video/2453015; "Okkupanty v Berdianske snesli pamiatnik ukrainskim voinam i ustanovili na ego meste novyi," *ZaBor—Gorodskoi portal Zaporozh'ia*, August 2, 2022, https://zabor.zp.ua/new/okkupanty-v-berdyanske-snesli-pamyatnik-ukrainskim-voinam-i-ustanovili-na-ego-meste-novyy-foto.

126 See Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*; Cohen, *War Monuments*.

Ukrainian statehood in the region dates only to 1918 and was always contingent on foreign support.[127]

These hastily erected monuments represented an effort to Russify the occupied parts of Ukraine. In order to strengthen the symbolic connection between Russia and the new territories it claimed, some of these monuments were subsequently replicated inside the aggressor country. Thus the motif of the "flag-wielding grandma" was also taken up in polymer statues and murals across Russia.[128] The idea of commemorating the nationalist-killing spy Pavel Sudoplatov was similarly imported back into Russia and the so-called People's Republics. Following the first bust installed in Melitopol' in July, a replica was unveiled in Donets'k in October, and another one in December in the Russian region of Briansk, which borders on Ukraine.[129]

Monuments planned

The speed of Russian monument-building activity was quite impressive given the seemingly more pressing concerns of the ongoing war. Still, their ambitions to build new monuments far outstripped their capacity to actually do so. Yet promises abounded. In Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region, a group of Cossacks, soldiers, reenactors, and Orthodox priests on May 29, 2022, celebrated the 799th anniversary of the Battle of the Kalka River that pitted a coalition of several Rus' principalities and Polovtsians against the Mongol Empire. In addition to linking that battle to later Russian and Soviet military victories, the participants presented a model of a planned new memorial to the battle.[130] In Kherson, the occupation administration

127 "Vozvrashchenie domoi."

128 For example, see "Prostoial odin den': v Belgorode pamiatnik 'babushke s krasnym flagom' ubrali po neobychnoi prichine," *Apostrof*, May 4, 2022, https://apostrophe.ua/news/world/2022-05-04/prostoyal-odin-den-v-belgorode-pamyatnik-babushke-s-krasnym-flagom-ubrali-po-neobychnoj-prichine/267952; for other examples and another discussion of Ivanova's story, see "Ta samaia babushka s krasnym flagom. Kak ona zhila, za chto molitsia i pochemu ne podozrevaet, kak vygliadit flag Rossii—interv'iu," *Spektr*, May 10, 2022, https://spektr.press/ta-samaya-babushka/.

129 "V Donetske otkryli pamiatnik agentu NKVD Sudoplatovu," *MK*, October 28, 2022, https://www.mk.ru/politics/2022/10/28/v-donecke-otkryli-pamyatnik-agentu-nkvd-sudoplatovu.html; "Biust sovetskogo razvedchika Pavla Sudoplatova otkryt v Brianskoi oblasti," *ZaMedia*, December 10, 2022, https://zapnews.ru/news/byust-sovetskogo-razvedchika-pavla-sudoplatova-otkryt-v-bryanskoy-oblasti.

130 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8661, June 22, 2022.

publicly discussed plans to erect a monument to Catherine II, in whose reign the modern city of Kherson was founded, in lieu of a destroyed ATO monument which had itself replaced a Lenin statue toppled during the Leninfall.[131] In addition, the occupation encouraged local residents with previously marginalized views to campaign for monument construction. In late July, an elderly lady in Kherson was collecting signatures for the restoration of a statue of Soviet secret police founder Feliks Dzierżyński (also known as Dzerzhinsky) that had been removed in February 2014.[132]

While some of the historical figures the Russians put forward for memorialization were obvious choices, in many other cases their selection represented a considerable stretch of historical realities. To stress a supposedly continuous and illustrious Russian presence in the occupied territories, they attempted to memorialize historical figures whose connection to the regions in question was tenuous at best.

Overall, Russia's management of monuments on occupied territory and more generally its politics of history, just like its military strategy, was based on an outdated and distorted understanding of Ukrainian realities. Russian claims notwithstanding, in post-Euromaidan Ukraine, and especially in the areas that Russia brought under its control, Red Army veterans continued to be honored,[133] and commemorative ceremonies for the Great Patriotic War regularly took place at Soviet war memorials, which were routinely maintained for such occasions. When the symbols the Russian administration had thought would near-automatically secure them the loyalty of local residents failed to attract much enthusiasm, they set out to find new historical personalities and events that would stress the region's quintessentially Russian identity. However, no local historians volunteered to work with the occupiers, and collaborators such as the Russian-installed Kherson region deputy governor Kyrylo Stremousov routinely got the names of military units and heroes wrong even as he spoke about the need to restore a commemorative cul-

131 "V Khersone ustanoviat pamiatnik Ekaterine II vmesto snesennogo v 2014 godu Lenina," *Interfax*, July 13, 2022, https://www.interfax.ru/world/851966.

132 Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork. On the removal of Dzerzhinsky's statue, see "V Khersone sniali pamiatnik Dzerzhinskomu," *Most* (blog), February 23, 2014, https://most.ks.ua/news/url/v_hersone_snjali_pamjatnik_dzerzhinskomu/.

133 Ukraine even introduced new commemorative medals for them in the anniversary year of 2015: "Pershi 16 veteraniv Druhoï svitovoï viiny otrymaly novi prezydents'ki medali," *TSN*, 16, accessed July 11, 2023, https://tsn.ua/foto/pershi-16-veteraniv-drugoyi-svitovoyi-viyni-otrimali-novi-prezidentski-medali-426310.html.

ture supposedly destroyed by Ukraine.[134] The Kherson region provides many examples of this misguided politics of history. Military or cultural figures singled out for commemoration included Soviet war correspondent Boris Gorbatov, whose connection with Kherson consisted in having published one newspaper feature about the city's liberation in March 1944; the poet and Napoleonic-era partisan leader Denis Davydov, who spent some time there as a young boy when his father's military unit was stationed near the town; and the nineteenth-century poet Afanasii Fet, who served in the military in an area that was then part of a governorate administered from Kherson but is located hundreds of kilometers from the present-day Kherson region.[135]

Over time, the Russian administrations appeared to lose interest in monuments. Whereas during the first months of the occupation, monument maintenance and associated ceremonies typically included Russian soldiers and often high-ranking Russian or proxy officials, by the late summer and fall of 2022, these tasks were increasingly left to locals and regular maintenance crews.[136]

New monuments in Russia and the Ukrainian territories occupied since 2014

In addition to monuments newly erected or planned for the occupied territories, a number of memorials were also put up in Russia itself. While the authorities initially kept a lid on public commemoration to downplay the number of the dead, commemorative plaques and other memorials soon started appearing on the initiative of soldiers' relatives and local and regional authorities. The Russian Military Historical Society, which has increasingly established itself as the main agency in charge of building war memorials since its creation in 2012, announced plans to create commemorative plaques and statues to select "heroes" of what Russia officially termed its "special military operation" in various Russian cit-

134 For video evidence, see Khomchenko, "Khersons'ki zradnyky."

135 See Mykola Homanyuk, "Unter Besatzung, Eine Chronik aus Cherson," *Osteuropa*, nos. 1–2 (2023): 69–96.

136 As documented in photos from Mykhailivka, Zaporizhzhia region, taken in August 2022. See "Rabotniki MP 'Mikhailovskii komunkhoz' priveli v poriadok pamiatniki pgt Mikhailovka," *Lenta novostei Zaporozh'ia*, August 4, 2022, https://zp-news.ru/society/2022/08/04/12985.html.

ies as well as in Crimea and the parts of the Donets'k region controlled by Russia since 2014.[137] Inside Russia, the names of dead soldiers were eventually added to monuments to those who died in what are known in official parlance as "local conflicts," from Afghanistan to Syria.[138] By February 2023, less than one year into the full-scale war, around 500 commemorative plaques to Russian soldiers who had died in the invasion were also installed on school buildings.[139]

The Russian authorities also continued their efforts to infuse public space with images of old and new war memorials in order to draw on the memory of past wars for justification of their military actions. Most prominently, a new 100-ruble note presented in June 2022 displays an image of the gigantic Great Patriotic War memorial near Rzhev that was inaugurated in 2020 as well as a museum complex dedicated to the Battle of Kulikovo of 1380 between the Golden Horde and several principalities of Rus'.[140] Moreover, existing Great Patriotic War memorials served as backdrops for funerals, post-funeral speeches, and interviews with relatives of the fallen.[141]

Finally, the full-scale invasion also had an impact on war memorials in those parts of Ukraine that Russia had controlled since 2014. The use of Second World War memorials as backdrops for commemorative ceremonies justifying the ongoing war intensified, as did maintenance and reconstruction activities and their portrayal in Russian propaganda media.

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137 "V trekh regionakh strany v Den' Rossii otkryty pamiatnye doski Geroiam Rossii—uchastnikam spetsoperatsii na Ukraine," *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, June 14, 2022, https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news/v-treh-regionah-strany-v-den-rossii-otkryty-pamyatnye-doski-geroyam-rossii-uchastnikam-specoperacii-na-ukraine.

138 For an example from Saratov, see "Na memoriale uvekovechili imena 44 pogibshikh na Ukraine voennykh," *SarBK*, May 6, 2022, http://news.sarbc.ru/main/2022/05/06/274033.html; "Spetsoperatsiia. V parke Pobedy uvekovechili novye imena pogibshikh saratovtsev," *Vzgliad-info*, December 9, 2022, http://www.vzsar.ru/news/2022/12/09/specoperaciya-v-parke-pobedy-yvekovechili-novye-imena-pogibshih-saratovcev.html. For context, see also Olga Ivshina, Becky Dale, and Joseph Lee, "Counting Russia's Dead in Ukraine—and What It Says about the Changing Face of the War," *BBC News*, June 16, 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-829ea0ba-5b42-499b-ad40-6990f2c4e5d0.

139 Avgust, "Voina eshche ne zakonchilas', a tablichki uzhe poiavilis'," *DOXA*, February 2, 2023, https://doxa.team/articles/school-memorials.

140 "Bank Rossii vypuskaet obnovlennuiu banknotu 100 rublei," Central Bank of the Russian Federation, June 30, 2022, http://www.cbr.ru/press/pr/?file=30062022_090638coins30062022_091534.htm; "V novoi storublevoi kupiure so Rzhevskim monumentom razgliadeli bukvy Z i V—zashifrovannye simvoly novoi pobedy," *Vashi novosti*, July 2, 2022, https://vnnews.ru/v-novoy-storublevoy-kupyure-so-rzhevski/.

141 Svetlana Eremeeva, *Mertvoe vremia: Voennye pokhorony 2022 goda v Rossii i v Ukraine* (Sverdlovsk [fictitious place]: Freedom Letters, 2023), 70, 101–2, 106, 275.

These were buoyed by similar efforts in the newly occupied areas (discussed earlier in this chapter). As some of these areas were now administratively integrated into the Russian-controlled Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics, monument-related activities were often presented as "republic-wide" projects. In addition, Russia's intensifying war propaganda created a demand for grand gestures, often in the form of renovating Soviet-era war memorials or building new ones. In some cases, monumental memorialization of those killed in the ongoing war on the Russian side happened almost in real time.

The most prominent example of renovation is the memorial on an ancient burial mound in the eastern part of the Donets'k region, known as Savur-Mohyla. A scene of fierce fighting during the Second World War, this mound south of the town of Snizhne was crowned with an obelisk soon after the war and later a more extensive memorial completed in 1967. In 2014, the hill changed hands between Russian and Ukrainian troops multiple times before finally remaining under Russian control. The memorial was almost entirely destroyed during the fighting, and both sides referred to the damage as evidence of continuity between German and present-day barbarity.[142] Since 2014, the rulers of the self-proclaimed Donets'k People's Republic have used the memorial for lavish commemorative ceremonies linking the struggles against Germany in the Second World War with that against Ukrainian "Nazis" in the twenty-first century.[143] Renovation began in 2015 but proceeded at a relatively slow pace. Then in 2022, around the major commemorative dates in May and June, the Russian Military Historical Society fired off a series of statements about the reconstruction project, ramping up its rhetoric about the "sacrilege" of what it claimed was its destruction by Ukrainian forces.[144] After this, the project gathered

142 For an example of Ukrainian discourse, see "Memorial na vershyni Savur-mohyly znyshcheno," *Istorychna pravda*, August 11, 2014, https://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2014/08/11/143944/. On the rhetoric of the Russian/separatist side, see Hellbeck, Pastushenko, and Tytarenko, "Wir werden siegen," 47–48.

143 Hellbeck, Pastushenko, and Tytarenko, "Wir werden siegen," 45–51.

144 "Memorial 'Saur-Mogila' budet vosstanovlen," *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, May 6, 2022, https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news/memorial-saur-mogila-budet-vosstanovlen; "Geroi nashego vremeni budut uvekovecheny na memoriale 'Saur-Mogila,'" *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, June 14, 2022, https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news/geroi-nashego-vremeni-budut-uvekovecheny-na-memoriale-saur-mogila; "Vladimir Medinskii: razrushenie memoriala Saur-Mogila sravnimo po koshchunstvu s bombezhkoi Rodiny-Materi v Volgograde," *Rossiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo*, June 16, 2022, https://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/news/vladimir-medinskij-razrushenie-memoriala-saur-mogila-sravnimo-po-koshunstvu-s-bombezhkoj-rodiny-materi-v-volgograde.

speed. By September 8, the renovated memorial was reopened in a pompous ceremony—including an address by Vladimir Putin and an on-site concert, which was broadcast on central Russian television.[145] The opening was timed to coincide with the Day of the Liberation of the Donbas, the most important regional holiday, which since 1944 has marked the date on which Donet'sk (then Stalino) was retaken from the Germans in 1943. It also came in the middle of preparations for the sham referendum that Russia used as a pretext to formalize the annexation of the occupied regions. At the preparatory stage, Russian propaganda had declared that the memorial's "original state" would be "preserved as delicately as possible."[146] Yet in addition to recreated reliefs related to the Second World War, the renovated memorial includes several large-scale depictions of persons killed fighting against Ukraine since 2014, including the known war criminals Mikhail Tolstykh (aka Givi) and Arsen Pavlov (aka Motorola), as well as a paratrooper from Dagestan killed on the first day of the 2022 invasion. The silhouette of the only female commander of a DNR army unit, Ol'ha Kachura (aka Corsa), was added to one of the reliefs within the space of two days after she was killed by artillery fire in late July.[147]

Coda: Monument construction as big business

In addition to its symbolic significance, monument construction is big business, with ample scope for personal enrichment. Since Soviet times, the most prominent Moscow-based monumental sculptors have been

145 Vladimir Putin, "Videoobrashchenie k uchastnikam tseremonii otkrytiia vosstanovlennogo memorial'nogo kompleksa 'Saur-Mogila,'" September 8, 2022, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69314; Mikhail Khokhlov kompozitor, "Saur-Mogila. 08.09.2022. 'Donbass za nami,'" Youtube video, 3:03, September 8, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WV-7pjHEVP0; Rosiiskoe voenno-istoricheskoe obshchestvo–RVIO, "Tseremoniia otkrytiia memoriala Saur-Mogila," Youtube video, 6:03, September 12, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3GqLcbBSGQ.

146 "Korrespondenty DAN obnaruzhili artefakt, kotoryi mozhet pomoch' v vosstanovlenii memoriala 'Saur-Mogila'," *Donetskoe agentstvo novostei*, July 5, 2022, https://dan-news.ru/culture/korrespondenty-dan-obnaruzhili-artefakt-kotoryj-mozhet-pomoch-v-vosstanovlenii/?lang=ru.

147 Artem Lokalov, "Na Donbasse posle rekonstruktsii otkryli memorial Saur-Mogila," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, September 14, 2022, https://rg.ru/2022/09/14/vozvrashchenie-simvola.html; Pavel Kutarenko, "Simvol mirnogo budushchego: memorial Saur-Mogila torzhestvenno otkryli v den' osvobozhdeniia Donbassa," *Telekanal "Zvezda,"* September 8, 2022, https://tvzvezda.ru/news/2022982230-m5h9G.html.

protégés of powerful political figures. Evgenii Vuchetich (1908–1974), the creator of the Treptow Park memorial in Berlin and the Motherland Calls statue in Volgograd, among many other works, had the support of many in the military leadership; Zurab Tsereteli (born 1934) had a reputation as Moscow mayor Iurii Luzhkov's court sculptor in the 1990s and early 2000s; and Salavat Shcherbakov (born 1955) has become the main author of patriotically-themed monuments in the Putin era with heavy support from the Russian Military Historical Society and its head Vladimir Medinskii, Russia's former minister of culture. All three sculptors have been accused of large-scale corruption by detractors.

In the occupation of Ukraine, too, money played a role in monument-building decisions. In March 2023, Vladimir Putin signed an order to use an unspecified amount of money from the presidential reserve fund to renovate and rebuild Great Patriotic War monuments across Russia and the Ukrainian territories it now laid claim to, as well as to build historical multimedia theme parks from the *Russia-My History* series in two of the newly annexed regions.[148] One such park had previously been estimated by Russian media to cost the equivalent of up to 13 million US dollars.[149] In another large-scale project, a team of twelve architects and sculptors including Shcherbakov proposed to build a series of "Beacons of the Russian World" on Ukrainian territory because, as they wrote, "Russia is expanding by returning to the historical territories of *Novorossiia*. It is necessary to show the close connection and continuity between architectural solutions in Russia and in the new territories."[150] The beacons, some of them constituting war memorials dedicated "To the Liberators of Donbas" or to "Peace," were projected for construction across the occupied territories and in places Russia only hoped to conquer (Odesa) or had

148 https://t.me/SolovievLive/164126, March 14, 2023; "Putin poruchil vydelit' sredstva na vosstanovlenie monumentov v Donbasse," *Regnum*, March 14, 2023, https://regnum.ru/news/3789206. The first two parks on Ukrainian territory were opened in September 2023: "Istoricheskie parki 'Rossiia—moia istoriia' otkrylis' v Luganske i Melitopole," https://myhistorypark.ru/for-visitors/events/v-luganske-otkryilsya-istoricheskij-park-%C2%ABrossiya-%E2%80%93-moya-istoriya, September 24, 2023.

149 "Igry patriotov: skol'ko stoit park 'Rossiia—moia istoriia' v Krasnodare," *RBK*, November 4, 2018, https://kuban.rbc.ru/krasnodar/04/11/2018/5bdc5fcb9a7947335292fcf1. On the content of the parks, see Ekaterina V. Klimenko, "Building the Nation, Legitimizing the State: Russia—My History and Memory of the Russian Revolutions in Contemporary Russia," *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 1 (January 2021): 72–88.

150 "Manifest," *Arkhitekturnyi proekt "Maiaki Russkogo mira,"* 2023, https://mayakrm.ru/manifest.

taken and then lost (Kupians'k, Kharkiv region). One of the architects involved, Aleksei Komov, called for funding restrictions and tendering procedures to be abolished for culturally significant architectural projects. Architects, he declared, were uniquely placed to "visualize" Russia's new "unifying ideology." They therefore needed to "join the government; nay, become the government and build a great Russia."[151] No beacons were built by mid-2024, though exhibitions presenting the project took place in several cities in Russia and occupied Ukraine.

The exact amount spent on building new monuments related to the war, either in Russia or in the occupied territories, is unknown. However, the new memorials were part of Russia's general campaign of reconstructing Ukrainian cities that had been destroyed or damaged in its own attack. The reconstruction of Mariupol' alone was declared to cost at least the equivalent of 2.4 billion dollars, and the process was profoundly intransparent.[152] Given the sheer size of monuments such as the new Savur-Mohyla memorial or the Aleksandr Nevskii statue in Mariupol', one can assume that these projects, in addition to their other purposes, helped line the pockets of several of the people involved in their planning and construction.

151 Elena Serdechnova, "Arkhitektor Aleksei Komov: 'Merilom tsennosti arkhitektury ne mozhet byt' ekonomika," https://mayakrm.ru/novosti/2024/arhitektor-aleksej-komov-merilom-cennosti-arhitektury-ne-mozhet-byt-ekonomika. *Arkhitekturnyi proekt "Maiaki Russkogo mira,"* February 12, 2024.

152 Vladimir Prokushev, "'Otrabotal mesiats—dali 5 tysiach': Kak rossiiskie kompanii zarabatyvaiut na vosstanovlenii Mariupolia," *Novaia gazeta*, February 10, 2023, https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2023/02/10/otrabotal-mesiats-dali-5-tysiach.

Chapter 5
Monuments Broadcast

Even before the advent of the Internet, the most important objective of both monument construction and destruction was often to send a message that was mediated by images. The cultural historian Aaron Tugendhaft has pointed out that even the earliest known perpetrators of iconoclasm in the ancient Near East aimed not so much to obliterate all images of a certain kind as to depict themselves destroying particularly important exemplars.[1] Iconic images of well-known monuments being toppled often convey the impression that all monuments of a certain type are being removed, even where that is very far from true.[2] Conversely, monuments are often deliberately built so as to look impressive in photos and drawings—this was certainly the case of war memorials in the Soviet Union.[3] Thus images of monuments have always been at least as important as monuments themselves.

Additionally, in an era of social media, the number of people interacting with even the largest memorial on site always pales in comparison with those whose experience of it is mediated by images. As discussed above, many modifications to monuments as well as ceremonies surrounding them were clearly staged by the occupiers for the purposes of producing propaganda images.

In 2022–23, photos of monuments destroyed, modified, or reconstructed played an important role in the propaganda wars accompanying the fighting. On both the Ukrainian and the Russian sides, some pic-

1 Tugendhaft, *The Idols of ISIS*.

2 See Leonie Beiersdorf, *Die doppelte Krise: Ostdeutsche Erinnerungszeichen nach 1989* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2015) for a detailed discussion of the East German context.

3 One example is the Krasnodon (now Sorokyne), Donets'k region, monument to the Youth Guard resistance group mentioned later in this chapter.

tures and videos showing monuments in war went viral, often stripped of their context to become generic symbols. Among Ukrainians and their supporters, examples are videos of the Russian shelling of the tank monument in Bucha (as a symbol of Russian military ineptitude); of a Russian armored vehicle ramming the ATO memorial in Enerhodar (symbolizing irreverence for Ukrainian war heroes); and of the reconstruction of the Lenin monument in Heniches'k (symbolizing re-Sovietization). Internet users have also circulated images and videos of the Glory Monument in Kherson against the background of reeds being burned along the banks of the Dnipro, presenting this as a symbol of war even though such reed fires are common in the region.

Conversely, the Russian side has also circulated photos and videos of war memorials in Ukraine through Telegram channels, news sites, and television, usually as symbols legitimizing the Russian presence by suggesting continuity between the World War II-era Red Army and present-day Russian troops. In addition to online media, photos of war memorials and other monuments also feature copiously in newspapers distributed both in Russia and in the occupied territories. These print media are much more important than it may seem: as Internet access was curtailed in occupied parts of Ukraine, the new Russian-produced papers found eager audiences there. Almost every issue of publications such as *Naddneprianskaia Pravda* or the special issues of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* for "the liberated territories" has featured amply illustrated articles about monument decay and reconstruction.

Given this importance of visual representations of war memorials, in this chapter we explore how they are framed, drawing on the systematic analysis of the hierarchical and alienating or familiarizing effects of camera angles proposed by visual semioticians Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.[4] Our application of the term "propaganda" to supporters of both Russia and Ukraine should not be seen as equating the two sides; we use the term not in opposition to "truth" but to describe efforts at spreading information widely in a desire to influence emotions and behavior.

4 Gunther R. Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 114–53.

Pictures and videos of war memorials in Russian propaganda

War memorials inside Russia had served as décor for propaganda videos well before the 2022 invasion. In 2017, Duma member Anna Kuvychko recorded a music clip set at the famous Mamaev Kurgan memorial in Volgograd in which underage members of various local cadet corps sang that "if the commander-in-chief calls us to the final battle, then, Uncle Vova, we are with you," using a diminutive form of Vladimir Putin's name.[5] In 2022, Great Patriotic War memorials were not the only ones used in this way. In November 2022, Russian Telegram channels circulated a video shot at Vladivostok's Monument to Primor'e Residents Who Died in the Course of Local Wars and Military Conflicts. The video showed a sending-off ceremony for young men presented as Cossacks who had volunteered to fight in Ukraine, including an oath, speeches, and interviews.[6] In these and other cases, the purpose was to illustrate a narrative about patriotism and a fighting spirit being passed on from hallowed ancestors to their worthy heirs.

However, the main focus of Russian propaganda was on war memorials inside the newly occupied lands. In the initial months of the invasion, roughly until the end of June 2022, many of the depictions of war memorials in Ukraine circulating in Russian offline and online media were specially orchestrated and produced by professional photographers and camera operators embedded with the Russian army or specially dispatched from Russia to report from Russian-occupied territories. Once the initial wave of propaganda abated and the commemorative season in May and June was over, amateur shots came to constitute a larger share of the pictures circulating in Russian social media, though the composition and angle of these images often emulated the professional ones.

The cast of the scenes differed, including Russian officials or proxy administrators, camouflaged soldiers, or local residents. However, war memorials were very rarely shown without people in front of them, and thus most images included one or several persons placed nearer to the viewers than the memorials themselves. These people mediated the mean-

5 Original video: GSVG-ZGV. Garnizon Rekhlin, Lerts, "'Diadia Vova, my s toboi'—pesnia o Putine. Volgograd. Mamaev Kurgan," Youtube video, 4:20, November 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3j1ZDtHEpbk.

6 https://t.me/majorselivanov/7150, November 8, 2022.

ing of the monuments for them and, in turn, drew their authority from their proximity to the hallowed memorials.

In the early stages of the invasion and in particular around commemorative dates, pro-occupation propagandists used Soviet war memorials as prime locations for interviews, speeches, and announcements, both concerning the monuments themselves and wider political plans and assessments. By placing speakers in front of memorials, such videos endow them with an authority derived from war memory. In addition, they also place them in an expert position, since usually some renovation activity is seen in the background, and the speaker implicitly represents the work being done (see figure 5.1).[7]

Another use for war memorials in visual propaganda was as locations for the destruction—often by immolation—of symbols understood as representing Ukrainian Nazism. Such acts were reminiscent of offerings to revered and sanctified ancestors, proving that the descendants faithfully watch over the tradition they represent. For example, in a video posted in early March 2022 but supposedly recorded on Victory Day the previous year, pro-Russian activists Ihor Telehin and Hennadii Shelestenko are seen burning a flag with the insignia of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, known as the Galician division, beneath a bust of Soviet war hero Mykola Subota in Kherson.[8]

More generally, Russian videos often use monuments as backdrops and anchors (that the camera keeps returning to after panning over the surrounding landscape) for discourse about a region's quintessentially Russian character. This type of décor was prized as an alternative to the other main setting for videos of official pronouncements, the office desk. A video from late July 2022 showed Russian-appointed Kherson regional governor Volodymyr Sal'do in front of a war memorial in Heniches'k, speaking about the region's imminent rebirth under Russian rule and referring to the location as "a place sacred to all of us" due to its role in the Great Patriotic War.[9] In another video shot at the same location on November 10, during Russia's withdrawal from Kherson, Sal'do and the leader of Russia's puppet Liberal Democratic Party proclaimed that despite this "difficult decision," Russia would return to the city, implicitly sug-

7 Example: https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 27, 2022.

8 Khersonskii vestnik, "9 maia 2021 goda. #Kherson, #patrioty Ukrainy #protiv fashizma," Youtube video, 2:13, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H704iPyyNI.

9 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/2619, July 26, 2022.

Figure 5.1. Interview with an anonymous "soldier of the Russian National Guard" during maintenance work at the Memorial Sign to the Skadovs'k Airborne Formation at the entrance to Skadovs'k (a KS-1 cruise missile mounted on a pedestal). Interviews with masked soldiers against the background of a monument were frequently broadcast from the occupied parts of Ukraine. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel REN-TV, April 27, 2022, t.me/rentv_news/45362.

gesting a parallel to victory in World War II after the initial Soviet retreat.[10] Other messages from the same day sugarcoating the Russian retreat also used war memorials as backgrounds.[11] Prior to the retreat, the use of monuments, and especially Second World War memorials, had spiked in September 2022, during the runup to the sham referendums on the occupied territories joining Russia.[12] Sal'do continued to use war memorials as locations for many of his videos after his flight from Kherson; thus, on Victory Day 2023, he recorded a Ukrainian-language message calling upon Ukrainian soldiers to lay down their arms, while standing below a famous Civil War monument located on a mound in Kakhovka, Kherson

10 LDPR, "LDPR posetila Khersonskuiu oblast'," VK video, 1:04, November 10, 2022, https://vk.com/video-433349_456242467.

11 For example, see https://t.me/alexandr_malkevich/10903, November 10, 2022.

12 For examples, see Chornobaïvka, Kherson region: https://t.me/VGA_Chernobaevka/277, September 20, 2022; Donets'k: https://t.me/dnrdonetsk/43186, September 21, 2022; Bilovods'k, Luhans'k region: https://t.me/luganskallnews/9529, September 22, 2022; Markivka, Luhans'k region: https://t.me/luganskallnews/9536, September 22, 2023; Milove, Luhans'k region: https://t.me/luganskallnews/9539, September 22, 2022; Kherson: https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3506, September 23, 2022.

region, known as the Legendary Machine-Gun Cart, interspersed with tilting shots moving toward the memorial.[13]

Armed and masked soldiers are almost invariably present in pictures or videos of war memorials. In general, low-angle shots, suggesting hierarchy, authority, and awe, were among the preferred ways of presenting such memorials (see figure 5.2).

Such angles were used, for example, for statues of soldiers to make it seem as if these soldiers were watching over the legacy of their victory in the Great Patriotic War. In one photo from May 6, 2022, the Victory Statue from Kherson's Park of Glory rises over Russian (and DNR) officials and soldiers, elevating their victory and justifying their control over the landscape surveyed.[14] Another common motif was reenactment. Many low-angle photos show members of the Russian army or National Guard standing at the foot of soldier statues and copying the soldiers' poses (see figure 5.3).[15] In one notable case in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, a group of young people in 1940s-style clothing posed on an improvised pedestal next to a war memorial.[16] They were copying the poses of the Young Guard anti-German resistance fighters represented in a famous monument from 1954 in Sorokyne (formerly Krasnodon), in the same region, called *The Oath*. The authors of the monument had deliberately created a silhouette that they thought would look impressive in school textbooks, and indeed images of the monument were widely reproduced in print in Soviet Ukraine and beyond.[17]

Other low-angle shots of soldier statues or reliefs are taken through eternal flames to cloak the soldiers in the fire of Victory, thus stressing the sanctity of the memorial.[18]

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13 https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/782, May 9, 2023.

14 https://t.me/wargonzo/6870, May 6, 2022.

15 For example, see https://storage.lug-info.com/cache/f/2/2f37df01-529e-47cc-a793-dcbeeac8b061.jpg/w1000h616 (from: "Torzhestvennoe zazhzhenie."); Snezhanna Belova, "Voennyi memorial v raione goroda Izium na Ukraine priveli v poriadok spetsnazovtsy iz Novosibirska," *vn.ru*, May 4, 2022, https://vn.ru/news-voennyy-memorial-v-rayone-goroda-izyum-na-ukraine-ubrali-k-9-maya-spetsnazovtsy-iz-novosibirska; https://t.me/v_and_z/454, May 1, 2022 (final scene in the video).

16 "Torzhestvennoe otkrytie."

17 See the transcript of the meeting of the Architecture Council of the Board of Architecture, Council of Ministers, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, July 22, 1946. Central State Archive of the Highest Organs of Government and Administration of Ukraine (TsDAVO), f. 4906 o. 1 spr. 2194 a. 5–6. See also Gabowitsch, "Visuals in History Textbooks."

18 "Vozvrashchenie domoi."; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8642, June 22, 2022.

Figure 5.2. A photographer taking pictures from a low angle at a ceremony at the Common Grave War Memorial in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, involving cadets from the A.S. Makarenko Melitopol' State University swearing an oath of loyalty to Russia. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *Vezhlivye liudi*, November 4, 2022, https://t.me/v_and_z/3067.

Low-angle shots were also used to show living people during commemorative events, typically to underline the authority of the people shown and the gravitas of the ceremony. This reverence can refer to a person's status, for example in the case of pro-Russian officials speaking at such ceremonies or soldiers carrying wreaths to a monument.[19] In photos and videos that show elderly people or children, it can also denote respect for old age and the transmission of Great Patriotic War memory between generations. Thus, a video from a small ceremony on May 1, 2022, in Dniprorudne, Zaporizhzhia region, uses low-angle shots to show the local soldier statue, an elderly lady with a rollator looking up at it, and a grandfather and grandson lighting the eternal flame together.[20] A RIA-Novosti video from a May 9, 2022, ceremony in Chornobaïvka, Kherson region, provides a low-angle shot of a preschool girl in a Red Army uniform singing a Russian song about war against the backdrop of a large memorial complex atop a communal grave;[21] a video from a later date by the same news agency, shot in the same location and from similar angles, shows a Russian soldier giving the girl a present, pinching her cheek, and congratulating her parents on having raised a good daughter who will "be our future."[22] In some cases, entire interviews are filmed using low-angle shots that visually place the speakers below a war memorial.[23]

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19 For example, at a ceremony for the Day of Remembrance and Mourning in Kyrylivka, Zaporizhzhia region, on June 22, 2022: https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8661, October 31, 2022.

20 https://t.me/v_and_z/454, May 1, 2022.

21 "V Chernobaevke Khersonskoi oblasti deti prochitali stikhi o geroiakh," *RIA Novosti*, May 9, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220509/pobeda-1787650274.html.

22 "Rossiiskie voennye dostavili adresnyi podarok devochke iz Chernobaevki," *RIA Novosti*, May 31, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220531/podarok-1792012946.html.

23 For an example, see https://t.me/luganskallnews/8355, May 8, 2022.

Figure 5.3. Low-angle shot showing Russian soldiers copying the pose of a soldier statue in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region. Image source: https://lug-info.com/news/torzhestvennoe-zazhzhenie-privezennogo-iz-moskvy-vechnogo-ognya-sostoyalos-v-starobel-ske, May 9, 2022.

Figure 5.4. A Russian National Guard soldier participating in monument maintenance, photographed using the golden ratio to position the Z symbol. Image source: Telegram channel *Khersonskaia narodnaia respublika*, April 12, 2022, https://t.me/herson_respublika/403.

Figure 5.5. Low-angle shot of Russian soldiers in front of a Great Patriotic War memorial in Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region, on the 81st anniversary of the German attack on the Soviet Union. Source: https://t.me/herson_rus/1787, June 22, 2022.

Other motifs shown using low-angle shots that convey special reverence and continuity between military heroism in the Great Patriotic War and the 2022 campaign include a list of the names of fallen heroes seen above a person respectfully cleaning a monument;[24] armed soldiers guarding a monument;[25] a sky with balloons exemplifying the Soviet trope of gratitude to war veterans for "clear blue skies;"[26] helicopters filmed in the sky as if they were being sent into battle by a soldier statue;[27] or a staged scene of a Russian soldier laying his hand on a monument to those who fell in 1941–1943.[28]

In the one case we found where Russian propaganda used selfie shots that left the top part of a memorial invisible, the video ended with a low-angle shot of the soldier statue against whose background it was filmed.[29]

In addition to low-angle shots, wide angles were also used in a number of photos and videos. With large memorials in particular, this was often done in order to convey awe and respect by contrasting them with the small figures of soldiers or participants in commemorative ceremonies, as in a *Komsolmol'skaia pravda* photo of armed soldiers gazing up at the monumental Attack monument built in 1985 atop Kremenets' hill in Izium, Kharkiv region (see figure 5.7).[30] Even in the case of smaller memorials not built around a central statue, wide shots were used to express respect and a military-hierarchical relationship between the living and the dead, as in a *Zvezda* TV channel video from Bilohorivka, Luhans'k region, that shows a Russian soldier standing at attention and saluting plaques with lists of local residents who died between 1941 and 1945.[31] Another use of wide shots is to show the crowds at commemora-

24 "V preddverii Dnia Pobedy."

25 See https://t.me/nkPravda/3710, May 9, 2022, and a low-angle shot from the same event whose source we are no longer able to ascertain.

26 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8661, June 22, 2022.

27 https://t.me/donezkiy/2313, September 12, 2022. Military expert Chris Owen interprets this video as an example of a flashy report sent by Russian commanders to their superiors to mask the dearth of training and resources on the ground: ChrisO_wiki (@ChrisO_wiki), "Did a culture of institutionalised lying contribute to Russia's recent disaster east of Kharkiv, by giving its senior commanders a distorted and false picture of the true situation on the ground? A [thread] reviewing the evidence," Twitter, September 14, 2022, 11:55pm, https://twitter.com/ChrisO_wiki/status/1570169288849326082.

28 https://t.me/rentv_news/45362, April 15, 2022, at 2:13.

29 https://t.me/iamKherson1/170, February 23, 2023.

30 https://s16.stc.yc.kpcdn.net/share/i/4/2332614/wr-750.webp, embedded in Aleksandr Kots, "Bezhentsy Iziuma: Nam by tol'ko v Rossiiu!," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, June 4, 2022, https://www.kp.ru/daily/27376/4569036/.

31 https://t.me/zvezdanews/84600, July 3, 2022.

Figure 5.6. A Russian soldier wiping a list of World War II participants with a piece of cloth. A common motif in videos and photos from the first months of the invasion. Image source: Telegram channel *Khersonskaia narodnaia respublika,* April 12, 2022, https://t.me/herson_respublika/403.

tive ceremonies,[32] though in some cases the purpose seems to be simply to show the entire group rather than the memorial itself.[33] A related mode of wide-angle presentation was to show Russian soldiers guarding memorials from imaginary attackers while they were being renovated.[34] In April 2022, the proxy administration of Kherson posted a set of professional photographs showing masked soldiers in full assault gear in front of a memorial, with the caption "The special operations forces of the Russian National Guard in Kherson defended a memorial to those who fell in the Great Patriotic War."[35]

Wide shots of memorials with soldiers are also used to graphically express the achievement of conquest, especially when monuments on elevations are involved.[36] Finally, Russian propaganda sometimes employs wide shots of an entire memorial to show its dilapidated state, as in a photo of an obelisk atop a communal grave from 1947 in Kakhovka, Kherson region, circulated with the caption "Under Ukraine."[37] As mentioned in the previous chapter, videos about monument maintenance sometimes artificially created a semblance of disrepair under Ukrainian rule.[38]

To reinforce the contrast, Russian media also display manipulated before-and-after pictures of supposedly restored monuments in territories

32 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8644, June 22, 2022; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834, May 29, 2022, at 00:18.

33 As in a set of pictures of people with St. George's Ribbons posing for a group photo in front of a memorial in Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region, on June 22, 2022, in which the upper half of the memorial's statue is cut off: https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8665, June 22, 2022.

34 See, for example, the final shot in https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6256, April 26, 2022.

35 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/977, April 15, 2022.

36 Egortsev, *Den' Pobedy na Dnepre*; 12:30.

37 https://t.me/herson_respublika/389, April 9, 2022.

38 Kokhanyi, "Na osvobozhennykh territoriiakh."

Figure 5.7. A wide-angle shot of armed soldiers gazing up at the Attack monument of 1985 atop Kremenets' Hill in Izium, Kharkiv region. Image source: www.kp.ru/daily/27376/4569036.

Russia occupied in 2014. Thus, a May 2022 special edition of the Russian newspaper *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* for the "liberated territories" showed a soldier-and-sailor statue in Sevastopol', Crimea, in the background of a photo showing the ruins of an unfinished building. The "after" photo simply showed the same monument from a different angle, providing no evidence that it had been in need of, or undergone, renovation, and omitting to mention that construction of the monument, initiated in 1982, had been completed in 2007 in independent Ukraine.[39] Wide shots of supposedly untended war memorials were also shown—*pars pro toto*—to illustrate general narratives about Ukrainian decline. Thus, one feature from the TV channel *Zvezda* showed a Great Patriotic War memorial on the territory of the long-abandoned Kherson Machine Building Plant, surrounded by uncut grass and debris, to exemplify the supposed decline of industry in the region under Ukrainian rule.[40]

Another mode of presentation employs close-up shots of individual elements of memorials to show that they are being restored and honored again after years of supposed neglect by Ukraine. Details shown at close range include red carnations;[41] candles lit for June 22;[42] eternal

39 Aleksandr Grishin, "Esli by Krym ostalsia ukrainskim...," *Komsomol'skaia pravda. Spetsial'nyi vypusk—Osvobozhdennye territorii*, May 2022. For the history of the monument and photos from 2011 showing it in excellent condition, see "Mys Khrustal'nyi," Putevoditel' po Krymu, April 3, 2011, https://aipetri.info/севастополь/мыс-хрустальный. While the Russian-appointed administration of Sevastopol' had announced plans to add a memorial complex to the statue, work on its construction had not begun by the time of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. See Aleksandr Kurbatkin, "Memorial'nomu kompleksu na Khrustal'nom byt'!," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, February 28, 2022, https://www.sevastopol.kp.ru/daily/27369/4552258/.

40 Mamsurov, "Put' k miru." 8:58.

41 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8671, June 22, 2022.

42 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6589, May 3, 2022.

flames,[43] sometimes followed by a zoom out to a wider angle of an entire ceremony;[44] models or sketches of planned memorials as evidence of monument-building activities;[45] lists of names or the head of a soldier statue to personify the presence of the past;[46] or the white glove on the hand of a soldier cleaning a list of names.[47] Other close-up shots of ceremonies around memorials showed participants' military distinctions and religious or commemorative symbols.[48]

Lastly, Russian TV channels have employed aerial shots, or shots from tall buildings, especially to provide a full view of large-scale commemorative symbols such as giant Victory Banners being unfurled[49] (see figure 5.8) or hoisted[50] or the words "For Victory" shorn into a lawn near a memorial to the local Great Patriotic War dead in an unnamed village in the Luhans'k region.[51] The intended effect here appears to be to stress the magnitude of Russian commemorative efforts but also the smallness of each individual in contrast with monuments or flags symbolizing collective heroism. Similar to closing scenes in Hollywood blockbuster films, aerial shots set to bombastic music were also used to signify a happy end after unavoidable carnage. The closing scene of a feature on the Russian "patriotic" channel *Zvezda* in late May 2022 about the "liberated" territories was an aerial shot of two Russian soldiers standing guard in front of a burning eternal flame at the Victory Monument in Kherson's Park of Glory. Symbolically linking the flame with the Russian presence, the speaker closed by referring to residents' "hope that Russia will never leave this place again."[52]

The ubiquitous use of war memorials to visually frame war propaganda was paradoxical. On the one hand, the memorials clearly appeared to

43 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8661, June 22, 2022.
44 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8658, June 22, 2022.
45 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834, May 29, 2022, 1:00.
46 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6754, May 6, 2022.
47 "V preddverii Dnia Pobedy." 0:18 in the embedded video.
48 For Afghan war medals, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8644, June 22, 2022; for various commemorative medals, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7821, 0:08; May 28, 2022; for an icon, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834, May 29, 2022, 0:01; for a St. George's Ribbon, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6665, May 4, 2022, 2:04.
49 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834, May 29, 2022, 2:20.
50 Anastasiia Gus'kova, "Znamia Pobedy podniali nad alleei Slavy v Khersone," *Izvestiia*, April 19, 2022, https://iz.ru/1322862/2022-04-19/znamia-pobedy-podniali-nad-alleei-slavy-v-khersone.
51 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6733, May 6, 2022, 3:28.
52 Mamsurov, "Put' k miru." 10:44.

Russian soldiers and administrators as familiar markers in a terrain that otherwise proved unexpectedly and disconcertingly foreign—as Soviet beacons in the Ukrainian steppe. Thus propagandists made efforts to use war memorials as props in a story about a certain location's historically rooted Russian identity or its role in the Great Patriotic War. In Kherson, a billboard advertising the short-lived pro-Russian *Tavriia* local TV station showed the local statue of the city's founder, Grigorii Potemkin, alongside a Russian flag, proclaiming that "Kherson is Russia."[53] In Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, the soldier figure from the Soviet war memorial in Berlin's Treptower Park was used instead as a generic illustration of the claim that "Russia is memory."[54]

On the other hand—as this recourse to a generic rather than local image attests—the way in which the images circulated often betrayed the Russians' lack of familiarity with Ukraine—unsurprisingly so, as the soldiers and even administrators typically involved in monument-related activities came from Russia. Especially in propaganda materials destined for a domestic Russian audience, some of the villages whose war memorials were presented in Russian pictures and footage remained unnamed while others were mislabeled.[55] In some cases, Russian soldiers appearing in propaganda videos talking about "our ancestors" seemed confused as to where they were and simply spoke of "this monument in this locality."[56] One Moscow-based TV channel trumpeted the return of a Lenin statue in Nova Kakhovka, the second-largest city of Kherson region, by calling it a "village" where locals had supposedly hidden the statue in a "kolkhoz" to protect it.[57]

Lack of familiarity also thwarted attempts to employ another mode of visual presentation deeply rooted in late Soviet and post-Soviet tradition: making images of monuments symbolize their cities.[58] The areas that came under Russian control in 2022 do contain a few widely known war memorials, primarily the above-mentioned Legendary Machine-Gun

53 Mykola Homanyuk's photo.

54 "'Khodim pod strakhom': Kak zhivet okkupirovannaia chasť Zaporozhskoi oblasti v ozhidanii 'referenduma'," *Novosti Donbassa*, September 13, 2022, https://novosti.dn.ua/ru/article/8143-hodim-pod-strahom-kak-zhivet-okkupirovannaya-chast-zaporozhskoj-oblasti-v-ozhidanii-referenduma.

55 In this video, for example, Lazurne is mistakenly presented as Skadovs'k: https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1674, May 5, 2022.

56 https://t.me/shot_shot/39151, May 4, 2022.

57 "V novoi Kakhovke vernuli pamiatnik Leninu," *Moskva 24*, May 1, 2022, https://www.m24.ru/videos/za-rubezhom/01052022/457233.

58 On this tradition, see Gabowitsch, "Visuals in History Textbooks."

Figure 5.8. "Cossacks from Melitopol' and Enerhodar," Zaporizhzhia region, unfurling a 200-meter Victory Banner near the Memorial to Local Warriors in the Great Patriotic War in the village of Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region, during a ceremony for the 799th anniversary of the "tragic battle of the Kalka River." The inscription on the Victory Banner contains several mistakes. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *Iuzhnyi platsdarm*, May 25, 2022.

Cart (Tachanka) in Kakhovka, Kherson region, and the Memorial of Glory for the Great Patriotic War on Kremenets' hill in Izium, Kharkiv region. However, due to their semi-rural positions, these memorials are known for their silhouettes rather than their location. In 2021, a photo of Kakhovka's Tachanka monument was erroneously used on a banner in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don to symbolize love of the city, instead of Rostov's own similarly named but stylistically different Tachanka monument.[59]

The only regional capital with well-known landmarks that the Russians managed to occupy was Kherson, and even that city remains foreign to the vast majority of Russia's population. In May 2022, posters started appearing on large billboards across Kherson to proclaim its Russianness ("Kherson—A City with a Russian History") or, later, to advertise a new Russian propaganda TV channel ("The People of Kherson are the Pride of Russia"). Some of these displayed local monuments as their main motif or in the background, but they do not appear to have had any impact locally and failed to gain traction outside the city.

In general, it is difficult to gauge whether the use of images or videos of war memorials and associated ceremonies in Russian propaganda did anything to sway anyone in favor of the invasion and occupation. One unintended effect, however, was to produce evidence of collaborationism

59 "Tsentr Rostova ukrasili bannerom s ukrainskoi tachankoi," Sait goroda Rostova-na-Donu, August 23, 2021, https://www.1rnd.ru/news/3186970/centr-rostova-ukrasili-bannerom-s-ukrainskoj-tacankoj.

for the Ukrainian side. Thus, the Telegram channel "Database of traitors in Kherson and the South of Ukraine" reposted images of commemorative ceremonies and identified Russian proxy officials who appeared in them.[60] In order to preempt punishment and retaliation, Russian propaganda channels often showed Russian soldiers and their collaborators appearing camouflaged or with their faces blotted out, sometimes making them seem more anonymous than the statues visible in the same pictures.[61]

Pictures and videos of war memorials in Ukrainian propaganda

(Pro-)Ukrainian media likewise circulate images of war memorials in order to establish continuity between the Second World War and the ongoing conflict, though here the focus is on defending the fatherland against invaders. In addition, memorials are often shown as evidence of the destruction wrought by Russia and as symbols of Ukraine's unbroken fighting spirit, including photos taken after liberation. Finally, footage of Holocaust and Second World War memorials and associated commemorative ceremonies is used in international media to counter Russian claims about a supposed ultra-nationalist government in Kyiv.[62]

Whereas on the Russian side even amateur photographers tend to use the hierarchical low angles employed by professional propagandists, in Ukraine the situation is reversed. Even professional (pro-)Ukrainian media prefer more "democratic" eye-level shots reminiscent of (sometimes selfie-style) images produced by citizen reporters. They frequently resort to panning video shots that establish equality between the object of the recording and the viewer by placing them on the same level, even if this means that a statue's head remains invisible. One example is a selfie video shot by Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksii Arestovych in front of a Second World War memorial in Novoselivka on the outskirts of Chernihiv on April 6, 2022, showing the surrounding destruction (see figure 5.9). In the video, Arestovych points out a wreath placed on the memorial to honor those killed by the Russians in the recent onslaught

60 For an example, see https://t.me/Kherson_kolaborant/3143, December 5, 2022.

61 For example, see https://t.me/YunarmiaHerson/56, February 16, 2023.

62 See, for example, this report by a Prague-based Russian-language TV channel: *Nastoiashchee vremia*, "Voina Rossii s Ukrainoi. Den' 34. Chast' 1," Youtube video, 2:03:26, March 29, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcXyGJyndag, starting at 1:36:37.

Figure 5.9. Panning shot with the head of a statue cut off. Screenshot from a video shot in Novoselivka, Chernihiv region, posted to Facebook by then Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksii Arestovych, www.facebook.com/alexey.arestovich/videos/5303446713008025, April 6, 2022.

and draws a line from those who defended Ukraine in World War II to those who did so in 2022.[63] In Luk'ianivka (Kyiv region), a correspondent for Radio Liberty's Ukrainian service filmed himself and a Ukrainian soldier against the backdrop of a World War II soldier statue surrounded by recently destroyed Russian armored assets. Though placed on a pedestal, in the video the statue never appears larger than either of the two men.[64]

As these videos show, World War II memorials often appear in Ukrainian and Western reporting as backdrops to the effects of the Russian onslaught. One widely circulated photo by *New York Times* photographer Lynsey Addario shows rescuers attending to the bodies of civilians shot dead by Russians in Irpin' near Kyiv, with the statue of a Soviet soldier kneeling in mourning visible in the background.[65]

The visual principle that people are at least as important as monuments, if not more, is also at work in an image selected as "photo of the year" by the Ukrainian photography website Bird in Flight. Taken by Hungarian photographer András Hajdú, it is a close-up shot of a twelve-year-old boy in Kherson's Freedom Square immediately after the city's liberation. Seen

63 https://www.facebook.com/alexey.arestovich/videos/5303446713008025, April 6, 2022; Olena Burkalo, "Arestovich: Chernigov i Sumy spasli Ukrainu," *Korrespondent.net*, April 6, 2022, https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/4466095-arestovych-chernyhov-y-sumy-spasly-ukraynu.

64 "Voina Rossii s Ukrainoi. Den' 34. Chast' 1," 00:56:42–00:57:38.

65 Andrew E. Kramer, "What Happened on Day 12 of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *New York Times*, July 3, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/07/world/ukraine-russia-war#a-ukrainian-familys-dash-for-safety-ends-in-death (published in the March 7, 2022, print version under the headline "Zelensky Urges Resistance as Shelling Halts Evacuations").

Figure 5.10. High-angle shot to survey scenery of destruction and to juxtapose a Soviet-era tank monument with an ineffective present-day Russian vehicle. Trostianets', Sumy region. Photo: Efrem Lukatsky / AP / picturedesk.com, March 26, 2022. Reprinted with permission.

in the background, Kherson's main memorial to the Heavenly Hundred and the ATO is blurred and cut off.[66]

Another common type of photo or video is the high-angle shot, taken from windows or balconies either by professional photographers or by private citizens. In contrast with the aerial shots common in Russian propaganda, such angles are used, on the one hand, to survey a scenery of destruction, as in an Associated Press photo showing a tank monument still standing on its pedestal amid a ravaged urban landscape in Trostianets', Sumy region (see figure 5.10),[67] or a scene of conflict, as in the brutal clampdown on participants in an anti-Russian demonstration in Kherson on March 21 who were trying to remove Russian graffiti from its central ATO memorial.[68]

On the other hand, the same images are also used to juxtapose Soviet tank monuments and other war memorials well-maintained by the Ukrainian authorities with the remnants of ineffective present-day Russian tanks.[69] The accompanying articles also openly or implicitly draw parallels with iconic photos of monuments damaged yet standing tall amid ruined cityscapes in World War I (Arras Cathedral) and World War II (Calais, Coventry, Dresden, or Nuremberg). The implication of all of these uses is to place Russia in the continuity of past aggressors, especially Nazi Germany.

66 L'olia Hol'dshtein, "Bird in Flight nazvav svitlynu 2022 roku," *Bird In Flight*, December 29, 2022, https://birdinflight.com/nathnennya-2/crytyka/bird-in-flight-nazvav-svitlinu-2022-roku.html.

67 "Istoriia odnogo foto. Tank-osvoboditel' i tank-okkupant," *Salidarnasts'*, April 1, 2022, https://gazetaby.com/post/istoriya-odnogo-foto-tank-osvoboditel-i-tank-okkup/184415/.

68 t.me/hueviyherson/14803, March 21, 2022.

69 "Istoriia odnogo foto."

Lastly, Ukrainian media sometimes use wide-angle shots showing a memorial empty of people to illustrate the Russian threat to normal commemorative activities, as in a photo from Pervomais'kyi, Kharkiv region, where events for May 8/9 were cancelled for fear of provocateurs.[70]

Thus, more frequently than in Russian propaganda, memorials in Ukrainian media are shown without accompanying people, establishing a direct, unmediated relationship between the viewer and the monument.

One genre in which this unmediated presentation came to full bloom consists of reinterpreted, decontextualized, or modified photos (as well as drawings, animated films, and other artwork) of Soviet war monuments and their use in illustrating Ukrainian resilience or Russian aggression. Compared to Russian propagandists, Ukrainians found it much easier to use monuments as landmarks for such purposes. The prime motif, since 2014, has been the Motherland Monument opened in 1981 atop what is now the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War—a gigantic allegorical statue of a woman that is a widely known symbol of Kyiv and its skyline.[71] Artistic reinterpretations of the statue proliferated so much in 2022 that the museum organized a thematic exhibition that displayed over a hundred of them.[72] Conversely, Ukrainian artists sometimes reimagined monuments located in Russia or important to Russian propaganda as symbols of Russian aggression and looting. The Motherland Calls monument in Volgograd from 1967 was the most frequent motif used in this way: the huge female figure was shown, for example, asking Russian soldiers to bring her back lace underwear[73] or calling them to their death,[74] even though one Kyiv designer reinterpreted

70 "V gromadakh Khar'kovskoi oblasti otkazalis' ot prazdnichnykh meropriiatii 8 i 9 maia," *Kharkiv Today*, May 5, 2022, https://2day.kh.ua/ru/kharkow/v-gromadakh-kharkovskoy-oblasti-otkazalis-ot-prazdnichnykh-meropriyatiy-8-i-9-maya.

71 For the use of this monument in the entangled commemorations of the Second World War and the war in Donbas, see Hellbeck, Pastushenko, and Tytarenko, "Wir werden siegen."

72 Aleksandra Klitina, "'Motherland. Redefining'—Monument Inspires Ukrainian Artists in New Exhibition," *KyivPost*, August 25, 2022, https://www.kyivpost.com/post/7200; Volodymyr Zahrebel'nyi and Oleksandr Bekker, "U stolytsi prezentuvaly novyi vystavkovyi proiekt 'Bat'kivshchyna-maty. Pereoznachennia,'" *ArmiiaInform*, August 20, 2022, https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/08/20/skulptura-batkivshhyna-maty-yak-znak-sprotyvu-rosijskij-agresiyi/. Online exhibition: "Bat'kivshyna-maty. Pereoznachennia," National Museum of Ukraine in the Second World War, August 2022, https://warmuseum.kyiv.ua/_ua/_presentations/bm/ua.php.

73 https://warmuseum.kyiv.ua/_ua/_presentations/bm/ua.php#gallery-13.

74 https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/105, March 2, 2022.

the two statues of women as sisters fighting each other.[75] Other memes reimagined Soviet soldier statues as looters carrying a toilet bowl, a carpet, or even a raccoon, such as the one stolen from Kherson's zoo during the Russian retreat from that city.[76] It is noteworthy that Ukrainian photographs and other depictions of even gigantic statues such as the Kyiv Motherland Monument, which is over 100 meters high, typically show them from a horizontal angle or in close-up shots of her head rather than the hierarchical low angles prevalent in Russian photographs. While no less intently than the Russian side in enlisting Soviet war memorials in a narrative of continuity between the defense of the fatherland both in the Second World War and today, it seems that the Ukrainian imagination does so in a mode of equality and repetition between historical eras rather than the hierarchical relationship common in Russia, in which today's warriors must prove themselves worthy of their ancestors. This is epitomized in an anime clip by musician Sasha Scherbakova and artist Artem Biryukov titled *The Sword* and shown as part of a museum exhibition, in which the Motherland statue becomes a swordfighter with youthful features who allies with a Cossack statue to fight a snake, Putin.[77]

In 2022, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry marked Victory over Nazism in World War II Day by posting an image of the statue's head covered with a red poppy wreath and the English-language comment: "The Motherland Monument in Kyiv is facing russia [*sic*] as a symbol of understanding our existential threat over the centuries. As a symbol of our future victory. Never again. 1939–1945. Again."[78]

The Ukrainian far-right designer and self-declared "wartime propagandist"[79] Denys Lytvynov, who became widely known in 2022, has

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75 pryadya, Instragram post, March 3, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CapisCONL6a.

76 Mordorskie novosti (@duremarik), Twitter, April 21, 2022, 5:12am https://twitter.com/duremarik/status/1516978227817992192; "[A monument to a Russian soldier holding stolen things: a carpet, a washing machine and a microwave]," SUCHO Meme Wall, no date, https://memes.sucho.org/#13k1ZOH4BFFL3jm27uPtyED6h_Eysdwa2; "[The Treptower Park Soviet monument's soldier holding a raccoon instead of a saved child]," SUCHO Meme Wall, no date, https://memes.sucho.org/#1jGHSnj_vxqBY8aMr9vCLj5aMxqPHC4ix.

77 Sera Sheer, "Sera Sheer—Mech (Feat. KINERO)," Youtube video, 2:50, July 22, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkzAeh-WaVE.

78 Defense of Ukraine (@DefenceU), "The Motherland Monument in Kyiv is facing russia as a symbol of understanding our existential threat over the centuries. As a symbol of our future victory. Never again. 1939–1945. Again," Twitter, May 8, 2022, 11:20am https://twitter.com/DefenceU/status/1523231432172179456.

79 Self-description on his Instagram channel: https://www.instagram.com/dennis_litvinoff, accessed in October 2022 and no longer online in March 2023.

Figure 5.11. Sticker with the silhouette of the Bakhmut monument honoring students of the Artemivs'k Flying Club who participated in the Great Patriotic War along with the inscription "Bakhmut is Ukraine." Kyiv, Prorizna Street. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, May 2023.

repeatedly used such monuments in the propaganda posters he has produced in great numbers, which mix a Soviet aesthetic with that of twentieth-century nationalism and early twenty-first-century science fiction.[80] One of them shows the silhouette of the Motherland Monument as the central element in a Kyiv skyline threatened by Russian missiles,[81] another places it in the background of a poster for a dystopian political project Lytvynov calls "Nuclearchy."[82] A poster calling for donations to the army ("Your contribution to Ukraine's victory") places a hand holding currency notes next to the Motherland Monument's sword-wielding hand.[83] Conversely, another poster shows Putin climbing the sword of the Motherland Calls statue from 1967 in Volgograd, which, as the caption says, "calls to die."[84]

Other posters by Lytvynov use monuments to symbolize cities. Thus, in one image that claims the Russian city of Belgorod for Ukraine, the city is symbolized by a statue of Prince Vladimir of Novgorod and Kyiv erected there in 1998 to mark the 55th anniversary of the city's liberation from German occupation.[85] In another poster, a 1972 monument to the eighteenth-century builders of Russia's Black Sea fleet stands for the city of Kherson, whose coming liberation is symbolized by a Ukrainian sword bisecting a double-headed snake.[86] In yet other posters, the silhouette of

80 Lytvynov has also publicly supported the removal of monuments to Russian cultural figures. See B.V., "Heťmans'ki Penzli: viina, natkhnennia, heťmanat, boroťba z radians'kymy pam'iatnykamy," *Telegraph*, July 24, 2022, https://telegra.ph/Getmanski-penzli-vijna-nathnennya-getmanat-borotba-z-radyanskimi-pamyatnikami-07-24.

81 https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/544, October 11, 2022. Another poster uses the statue from Kyiv's Independence monument in a similar position to symbolize Ukraine. See https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/312, May 9, 2022.

82 https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/452, July 16, 2022.

83 https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/203, April 4, 2022.

84 https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/105, March 2, 2022.

85 https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/197, April 2, 2022.

86 https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/387, June 7, 2022.

Figure 5.12. "Welcome to Kharkiv, city of heroes," route E105. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, December 2022.

the equestrian statue of Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi in Kyiv from 1888 stands for the defense of Kyiv or Ukrainian revenge.[87]

While the Motherland monument was by far the most frequent motif in the iconography of defiance, other statues of national, regional, or local significance were also used in similar fashion. During the drawn-out battle for Bakhmut, Donets'k region, a local memorial in the form of a MiG-17—a post-World War II military airplane installed in memory of members of the local aviation club who fought in that war—became a frequent backdrop for selfie shots symbolizing the city's Ukrainian identity and

87 https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/67, February 25, 2022.

an emblem reproduced on stickers throughout Ukraine (see figure 5.11); it was destroyed on March 10, 2023, presumably by the Russian forces.[88]

In addition, Ukrainian propaganda has also drawn on the international iconography of World War II memory. Thus, in December 2022, a roadside billboard welcomed drivers to "Kharkiv, city of heroes," using the silhouette of Joe Rosenthal's famous 1945 photograph of six United States Marines raising the US flag on Iwo Jima (also immortalized in the United States Marine Corps War Memorial near the gate to Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia), replacing the US flag with a Ukrainian one (see figure 5.12).[89]

While such images attempt to illustrate the liberation of previously occupied or embattled territories with reference to a war-themed visual canon, in practice the most varied landmarks could become liberation monuments. Thus, in November 2022, following the liberation of Kherson and some of the surrounding areas, Ukrainian soldiers and many others took selfies against the background of a Monument to the Kherson Watermelon in Osokorivka, Kherson region, to mark the departure of Russian troops.[90]

88 For the monument as a visual symbol, see Vadym Petrasiuk, "'Shche zh ne povne peklo!': Istoriï tykh, khto zakhyshchaie Bakhmut, i khto v n'omu zalyshaieťsia, popry vse," *Ukraïns'ka pravda*, accessed July 18, 2023, https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2023/01/20/7385552; "Liutyi. Biznesmen ide na viinu," *Forbes.ua*, n.d. Its destruction: "U Bakhmuti znyshcheno pam'iatnyk litaku MiH-17, iakyi stav symvolom oborony mista," *Liga*, October 3, 2023, https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/video/v-bahmute-unichtojen-pamyatnik-samoletu-mig-17-kotoryy-stal-simvolom-oborony-goroda-video.

89 Photograph in Mykola Homanyuk's collection.

90 Telekanal Inter, "Simvol osvobozhdeniia Khersonskoi oblasti—pamiatnik arbuzu," Youtube video, 2:06, November 10, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WI_oucBNkw.

Chapter 6
Responding to Invasion: Toppling Monuments, Building Monuments

Monuments defiant

In addition to becoming decontextualized symbols of resistance in the form of memes and online photographs, monuments and especially war memorials both inside and outside the occupied areas served Ukrainians locally as canvases for anti-occupation messages.

This kind of use had already begun following the initial Russian invasion in 2014. One example is the gilded eagle on top of the Monument of Glory in central Poltava, a 10 meter tall cast iron column installed in 1811 to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Peter I's victory over the Swedish army. Since 2014, the eagle has been adorned with the blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag and the red-and-black flag of the UPA. This use has been controversial, and the flags have repeatedly disappeared, only to be replaced by the city administration.[1]

Following the 2022 invasion, anti-occupation messages soon appeared across the occupied territories. The slogan "Putler is a dickhead 19/03/2022" was written on the Danube Fleet monument in Kherson on the day indicated (see figure 6.1). In Beryslav, Kherson region, on May 9, someone painted graffiti reading "Putin is a dickhead," "Putin, drop dead," and a Ukrainian flag on the local tank monument.[2] On July 22, the pedestal of another nearby monument, a memorial at a communal cemetery on the outskirts of Beryslav, Kherson region, was painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag.[3]

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1 "Prapory z monumentu Slavy u Poltavi znovu znykly," *Kolo.News: Novyny Poltavy*, April 24, 2021, https://kolo.news/category/situatsiyi/25934.

2 https://t.me/suspilnekherson/11583, May 9, 2022.

3 "149 den' viiny: khronika podii v Khersons'kii oblasti," *Suspil'ne. Novyny*, July 22, 2022, https://suspilne.media/263162-149-den-vijni-hronika-podij-v-hersonskij-oblasti.

Figure 6.1. Danube Fleet monument in Kherson with graffiti "Putler is a dickhead." Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, March 2022.

Flags—both painted and cloth—were among the main symbols of defiance. The tank monument at the entrance to Kherson's Park of Glory can serve as an example. A Ukrainian flag was installed on it on February 24, the first day of the invasion. On March 13, during one of the largest anti-occupation demonstrations in the city, someone put up several such flags on the tank, including a large one on which demonstrators signed their names. The flags were only taken down by the occupation administration at the end of March, as was the Ukrainian flag attached with adhesive tape to the polymer kneeling soldier statue of one of Kherson's Soviet-Afghan War monuments.[4]

Veritable flag wars ensued in a number of locations. The occupiers and local residents repeatedly put up their own flags and took down each other's. Thus, in Hola Prystan', Kherson region, a Russian flag was hoisted on April 24 on the flagpole of the Walk of Glory, a composite memorial to different local heroes, only to be taken down again by unknown locals the next day. Two days later the flag was put up again and an eternal flame lit at the memorial.[5] A large Victory Banner hoisted on a flagpole in Kherson's Park of Glory was likewise taken down twice.[6] Conversely, at the Border Guards monument in Kherson, Ukrainian flags were put up several times and taken down by the Russians each time.[7] (At the same monument,

4 Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

5 https://t.me/hueviyherson/17552, April 25, 2022; "Pamiatnik voinam-zemliakam v Goloi Pristani," ***Shukach***, September 22, 2015, https://www.shukach.com/ru/node/47112; https://t.me/herson_today/314, April 27, 2022.

6 Mykola Homanyuk's observations on site; Iryna Parshyna, "V Khersone okkupanty usilenno okhraniaiut vyveshennyi imi v tsentre goroda krasnyi flag," *Tsentr zhurnalists'kykh rozsliduvan'*, April 25, 2022, https://nikcenter.org/ru/2022/04/newsitem-68210.

7 Mykola Homanyuk's observations on site.

a yellow ribbon, symbolizing nonviolent resistance against the Russian occupation, was attached to the machine gun of the soldier statue sometime in May, only to be replaced with a St. George's Ribbon (see next chapter) by the Russian side on May 28 for Border Guards' Day.[8]) In June, a man was filmed taking down a Victory Banner hoisted on a flagpole in Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region.[9] In Mariupol', Donets'k region, several Russian flags disappeared from flagpoles in the city's central Freedom Square in October 2022.[10]

On May 9—Victory Day—Ukrainian flags were used in some places in the Kherson region as a sign of resistance against Russian forces appropriating Great Patriotic War memorials and the associated commemorative rituals. In Novotroïts'ke, locals organized a ceremony with Ukrainian flags at the local war memorial. Participants brandished Ukrainian flags, laid wreaths, and played the Ukrainian anthem. The head of the village council gave a speech and an Orthodox priest conducted a memorial service—all under the eyes of several armed Russian soldiers.[11] In Chaplynka, a similar ceremony with Ukrainian flags appears to have led to the dismissal of the Russian military governor for not having intervened.[12] In the village of Askaniia-Nova, local residents conducted a Victory Day ceremony and deliberately sang songs in both Russian and Ukrainian to counter the claim that they are oppressed Russians.[13]

On the one hand, acts of local resistance involving war memorials sometimes existed only in the Russian imagination. Thus, on May 22, a Russian Telegram channel proclaimed that "vandals" had "defiled" a Great Patriotic War memorial in Skadovs'k, Kherson region, and had "attempted to extinguish the eternal flame."[14] In fact, according to a local

8 "Kherson rozpochav aktsiiu nenasyl'nyts'koho sprotyvu rosiis'kii okupatsii 'Zhovta strichka'," *Most*, April 26, 2022, https://most.ks.ua/news/url/herson_rozpochav_aktsiju_nenasilnitskogo_sprotivu_rosijskij_okupatsiji_zhovta_strichka.; Mykola Homanyuk's observations on site.

9 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8566, June 19, 2022.

10 "Okupanty navit' ne pomityly: u Mariupoli z flahshtokiv znykly prapory RF," *RBK-Ukraïna*, October 20, 2022, https://www.rbc.ua/rus/styler/okupanti-navit-pomitili-mariupoli-flagshtokiv-1666249811.html.

11 Polina Mirer, "300-metrove 'smuhaste prostyradlo': 9 travnia v tymchasovo okupovanykh mistakh," *Suspil'ne: Novyny*, September 5, 2022, https://suspilne.media/237573-300-metrove-smugaste-prostiradlo-9-travna-v-timcasovo-okupovanih-ukrainskih-mistah; oral communication by a local correspondent.

12 Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork.

13 Student essay about Askaniia-Nova.

14 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/2202, May 24, 2022.

resident, no vandalism had occurred, and the flame had been blown out by strong winds.[15]

On the other hand, conflicts over monuments could also turn very real and violent. The most prominent example occurred when, on March 21, anti-occupation demonstrators in Kherson tried to clean the memorial to ATO soldiers on Freedom Square, which Russians had covered with graffiti such as "Murderers of Donbas children." In response, Russian soldiers dispersed the demonstration by shooting in the air and using tear gas and concussion grenades, leaving several people injured.[16]

In the unoccupied parts of Ukraine, another way of using war memorials to express defiance was to deliberately refrain from repairing monuments damaged by Russian shelling. In the run-up to Victory Day, Kharkiv's Mayor Ihor Terekhov announced that the Memorial of Glory had been checked for mines and that municipal workers had "gotten our Memorial ready for May 9" by planting fresh flowers and tending to the communal graves, but the traces of Russian damage had been deliberately left in place "as symbols of our struggle with present-day Nazism." He also advised Kharkiv residents to refrain from visiting the memorial on May 9: "Our enemy is insidious and cynical, and we can expect particular cruelty and ferocious shelling, especially on this day, which is sacred to all of us." Kharkivites, he declared, would bring flowers to the memorial "on the day of our Victory," commemorating the dead of both the Second World War and the war against Russia.[17]

Monuments and anti-war protest in Russia

Inside Russia, some antiwar resistance also targeted monuments. Most direct antiwar action in Russia came in the form of arson or other attacks on military recruitment offices and occasionally (though far less actively

15 Mykola Homanyuk's interview with a resident of Skadovs'k.

16 "Okupanty napaly na myrnyi mitynh u Khersoni, ie poraneni ta zatrymani," *Kavun.City*, March 21, 2022, https://kavun.city/articles/200129/okupanti-napali-na-mirnij-miting-u-hersoni-ye-poraneni; "Rossiiskie voiska so strel'boi razognali demonstratsiiu v Khersone. Est' ranenye," *BBC News Russkaia sluzhba*, March 21, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-60820472.

17 "Terekhov: povrezhdeniia ot rossiiskikh 'gradov' dolzhny ostat'sia na Memoriale slavy kak simvol nashei bor'by s sovremennym natsizmom," *Interfax-Ukraina*, May 5, 2022, https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/829957.html.

than in Belarus) on railroad tracks. Yet, in at least one case, damage was done to one of the new structures erected to celebrate Russia's war of conquest: in June 2022, in Cheboksary, Chuvashia, two young men damaged an installation in the form of an orange-and-black letter Z. They were eventually sentenced to eight months of nighttime house arrest.[18]

At the same time, ordinary Russians also used Ukrainian-themed memorials to the Great Patriotic War and other monuments to express opposition to the Russian invasion, or at least empathy with the victims. Next to the Kremlin wall in Moscow, a series of granite steles installed from 1975 onward honors the USSR's "hero cities" in the Great Patriotic War;[19] since the beginning of the Russian attack in 2014, Russian officials, the Ukrainian embassy, and regular visitors had used it to express their attitude toward the ongoing war by either laying flowers there on commemorative dates or omitting to do so.[20] Following the 2022 invasion, taking flowers to the Kyiv and Odesa steles—as well as a mosaic at the *Kievskaia* metro station—once again became a cautious act of expressing anti-war feelings.[21] In April 2022, an activist was detained for standing in front of the Kyiv stele with a copy of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.[22] Other war memorials likewise became sites of contestation. In Kamensk-Ural'skii, Sverdlovsk region, officials had had a Z symbol painted on an armored vehicle that serves as a memorial to soldiers who died in Afghanistan and Chechnya. In July 2022, someone added three letters to spell the word "AZOV," the name of a regiment that Russian propaganda associates with Ukrainian radical nationalism.[23]

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18 "Povredivshim installiatsiiu v vide bukvy Z zhiteliam Cheboksar zapretili poseshchat' magaziny razlivnogo piva," *Mediazona*, January 2, 2023, https://zona.media/news/2023/01/02/cheb-z; Sudebnyi uchastok No. 2 Leninskogo raiona g. Cheboksary, "Delo No. 1-12/2022," November 18, 2022, http://len2.chv.msudrf.ru/modules.php?name=sud_delo&op=cs&case_id=108033804&delo_id=1540006.

19 On the Hero Cities, see Ivo Mijnssen, *Russia's Hero Cities. From Postwar Ruins to the Soviet Heroarchy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2021).

20 "Est' tsvety u stely goroda-geroia Kieva!," *Gordonua.com*, May 4, 2016, https://gordonua.com/news/worldnews/posolstvo-ukrainy-v-rf-ukrasilo-zhelto-sinimi-cvetami-stelu-kieva-u-sten-kremlya-i-vystavilo-tam-karaul-131082.html.

21 https://t.me/sotaproject/35820Ay, February 27, 2022; Andrei Pivovarov (@brewerov), "Moskvichi nesut tsvety na stantsiiu metro Kievskaia," Twitter, March 8, 2022, 12:04pm, https://twitter.com/brewerov/status/1501151867144966149.

22 https://t.me/sotaproject/38570, April 10, 2022.

23 Mikhail Furmanov, "Sverdlovchanin oskvernil voennyi pamiatnik, ostaviv nadpis' Azov," *Ura.ru*, July 12, 2022, https://ura.news/news/1052569289.

In January 2023, after a Russian missile destroyed part of a residential building in Dnipro, killing over 40 people, people brought flowers, toys, candles, and photographs to several Ukrainian-themed memorials across Russia, such as statues to the poets Lesia Ukraïnka and Taras Shevchenko.[24] Other monuments used for such purposes included memorials to the victims of Stalinist repressions.[25] In Kerch' in occupied Crimea in May 2023, residents commemorated the 1944 deportation of the Crimean Tatars by bringing blue-and-yellow (and other) flowers to a deportation memorial.[26]

Iconoclasm abroad and in free Ukraine

Another way of responding to Russia's full-scale invasion was iconoclastic. Monuments seen as Russian or Soviet were toppled both inside and outside Ukraine.[27]

In Poland, where a centralized removal campaign that started in 2017 had already gotten rid of most such memorials, some of the few left standing disappeared from public space following the February 2022 attack.[28] In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the authorities dismantled or removed a large number of war memorials—which, as elsewhere, had been less sys-

24 "V Moskve poiavilsia stikhiinyi memorial zhertvam udara v Dnepre," *Radio Svoboda*, January 17, 2023, https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-moskve-poyavilsya-stihiynyy-memorial-zhertvam-udara-v-dnepre/32226655.html; "Stikhiinye memorialy v Rossii v pamiat' o zhertvakh udara po Dnepru: kak eto vygliadit," *BBC News Russian Service*, accessed March 9, 2023, https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-64333356. For overviews of such actions, see Aleksandra Arkhipova, "Empatiia kak protest," *Kholod*, February 2, 2023, https://holod.media/2023/02/02/flower-protest; ********** [pseudonym], *U fashistov malo kraski* (Gor'kii [fictitious place]: Freedom Letters, 2023), 252.

25 For an example in Tver', see "V Tveri sud schël diskreditatsiei armii vozlozhenie tsvetov k pamiatniku," *TIA*, February 10, 2023, https://tvernews.ru/news/295648/.

26 "V Kerchi nesut tsvety k memorialu pamiati zhertv deportatsii krymskotatarskogo naroda," *Krym.Realii*, May 18, 2023, https://ru.krymr.com/a/news-krym-kerch-tsvety-memorial-pamyati-zhertv-deportatsii-krymskotatarskogo-naroda/32417367.html.

27 For more on this, see "War on Monuments: Documenting the Debates over Russian and Soviet Heritage in Eastern and Central Europe," ed. Kristina Jõekalda, special issue, *Kunsttexte*, no. 1 (2024). An overview is provided in Mischa Gabowitsch, "Mimetic De-Commemoration: The Fate of Soviet War Memorials in Eastern Europe in 2022–2023," *Kunsttexte*, no. 1 (2024).

28 "Poland Begins to Dismantle Soviet-Era Monument," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 2022, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-08-24/poland-begins-to-dismantle-soviet-era-monument; "Demontaż pomników Armii Czerwonej. Leśkiewicz: usuwane są obiekty o charakterze propagandowym," *Polskie Radio 24*, October 29, 2022, https://polskieradio24.pl/130/5925/artykul/3062104,demontaz-pomnikow-armii-czerwonej-leskiewicz-usuwane-sa-obiekty-o-charakterze-propagandowym.

tematically affected by earlier decommunization campaigns than other kinds of monuments—following public debate of varying degrees of openness.[29] In Bulgaria, the Russian aggression tipped the scales of a long-running debate in favor of a decision to move the 1954 Monument to the Soviet Army from central Sofia to an open-air Museum of Socialist Art.[30] In Czechia, a bronze statue of a Soviet soldier was removed from a war memorial in Přibyslav in March 2022; the mayor claimed that this decision was temporary and served at least in part to protect the statue.[31]

In all of these countries, the Russian aggression emboldened those who had already associated all or most Soviet statuary, including war memorials, with Russian imperial oppression, and convinced many others that such monuments were untenable. More nuanced voices urging the consideration of preservationist and other aspects were drowned out. There was some limited resistance to removal. The Bulgarian decision immediately sparked protests.[32] In Narva, Estonia, a small gathering took place to prevent a rumored unannounced removal of the local tank memorial;

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29 On pre-2022 iconoclasm against Soviet war memorials and its limits, see Gabowitsch, "What Has Happened to Soviet War Memorials." On acts of removal in 2022 in the Baltic countries, see, for example: Mark Dunkley, "Monumental Decisions: The Impact of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Soviet War Memorials," *The Historic Environment: Policy & Practice* 14, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 227–35; Amos Chapple, "Estonia's Contentious Soviet Monuments," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 15, 2022, https://www.rferl.org/a/estonia-soviet-monuments-removal/31989524.html; "Removed Narva War Monuments Become State Property," *ERR News*, August 23, 2022, https://news.err.ee/1608692881/removed-narva-war-monuments-become-state-property; "Up to 300 Soviet Monuments Set for Removal in Latvia," *LSM*, June 30, 2022, https://eng.lsm.lv/article/culture/history/up-to-300-soviet-monuments-set-for-removal-in-latvia.a463529/; "Lithuania's Kaunas to Remove Soviet Memorials, Vilnius Won't Follow Suit for Now," *LRT*, November 4, 2022, https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1670208/lithuania-s-kaunas-to-remove-soviet-memorials-vilnius-won-t-follow-suit-for-now; "Soviet Statues from Antakalnis Cemetery in Vilnius to Be Moved to a Park," *LRT*, March 29, 2023, https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1950033/soviet-statues-from-antakalnis-cemetery-in-vilnius-to-be-moved-to-a-park.

30 "Sofia's City Council Approves Plan To Move Contentious Soviet Red Army Monument," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, March 9, 2023, https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-sofia-red-army-mnument-moved/32310767.html. On past conflicts around the monument, see Daniela Koleva, "Pamiatnik sovetskoi armii v Sofii: pervichnoe i povtornoe ispoľzovanie," in *Pamiatnik i prazdnik: Etnografiia Dnia Pobedy*, ed. Mikhail Gabovich [Mischa Gabowitsch], trans. Aleksandr Beliaev (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020), 294–309.

31 Tereza Pešoutová, "Pískovcový rudoarmějec z náměstí v Přibyslavi musí pryč. Chtějí ho ochránit před možným poškozením," *Český rozhlas: Vysočina*, March 9, 2022, https://vysocina.rozhlas.cz/piskovcovy-rudoarmejec-z-namesti-v-pribyslavi-musi-pryc-chteji-ho-ochranit-pred-8698272.

32 "Protests, Human Chain after Soviet Monument in Bulgaria Slated for Removal," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, March 10, 2023, https://www.rferl.org/a/sofia-soviet-monument-protest-bulgaria/32311884.html.

in Latvia, there were a few reported cases of construction workers refusing to engage in acts of demolition.[33] Controversy sometimes centered on whether decisions on monument removal should be taken by local or central governments and whether to remove monuments from public view altogether or transfer them to museum spaces.[34]

However, the geography of this new wave of iconoclasm was circumscribed. No acts of removal of memorials to Red Army soldiers were reported from Moldova or from NATO member states Norway, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Italy, France, and the United States, even though individual politicians in some of those countries publicly advocated removing some monuments or parts thereof.[35] In Hungary, Russian officials even unveiled several renovated or rebuilt monuments to Red Army soldiers after February 2022; a few days after one of them was opened in the village of Csákberény, anti-war activists wrapped a memorial in black foil and attached the flags of Hungary, Ukraine (with the Hungarian-designed coat of arms of Carpathian Ukraine), and the EU to it in an act of protest.[36]

The new iconoclasm responded to Russia's increasingly active attempts to claim a monopoly over the right way to honor the memory of victory over Nazi Germany and sought to deprive would-be supporters of the Russian invasion of symbolically charged meeting places. In a number of other countries, Soviet war memorials were used as canvases for messages against the invasion. Thus, in Berlin's Treptower Park, at the largest such memorial outside the former Soviet Union, anti-Russian graffiti was

33 ERR, "Vozle sovetskogo pamiatnika-tanka v Narve sobralos' bolee 100 chelovek," *ERR*, March 8, 2022, https://rus.err.ee/1608674926/vozle-sovetskogo-pamjatnika-tanka-v-narve-sobralos-bolee-100-chelovek; Dinija Jemeljanova, "Padomju pieminekļu demontāža reģionos rit lēnām," *LSM*, August 25, 2022, https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/padomju-pieminekli-demontaza-regionos-rit-lenam.a470942/.

34 "Koalitsiia v Narve priniala reshenie o perenose tanka-pamiatnika," *ERR*, August 8, 2022, https://rus.err.ee/1608678874/koalicija-v-narve-prinjala-reshenie-o-perenose-tanka-pamjatnika.

35 For examples, see Stephanie Höppner, "Sowjetische Denkmäler: Kann das weg?," *Deutsche Welle*, August 17, 2022, https://www.dw.com/de/sowjetische-denkm%C3%A4ler-kann-das-weg/a-62837005; "Hungarian Jobbik Party Calls for Dismantling of Soviet Monument in Budapest," *TVP World*, October 17, 2022, https://tvpworld.com/63993035/hungarian-jobbik-party-calls-for-dismantling-of-soviet-monument-in-budapest.

36 "V Vengrii otkryli vosstanovlennyi pamiatnik sovetskim voinam," *RIA Novosti*, June 19, 2023, https://ria.ru/20230619/pamyatnik-1879254286.html; László Szily, "'Úgy érezzük, hogy mára Oroszország saját felségterületének tekinti Magyarországot, ezért reagáltunk mi,'" *444*, June 26, 2023, https://444.hu/2023/06/26/ugy-erezzuk-hogy-mara-oroszorszag-sajat-felsegteruletenek-tekinti-magyarorszagot-ezert-reagaltunk-mi.

sprayed on the pedestal of the main statue. At the Tiergarten war memorial, also in Berlin, activists covered a tank with a Ukrainian flag and, on a separate occasion, hoisted a banner that read "Putin is Hitler."[37] In Vienna, the wall behind the 1945 Soviet war memorial on Schwarzenbergplatz was painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag. In Czechia and Slovakia, a number of Soviet war memorials were painted blue-and-yellow or blood-red or covered with anti-invasion graffiti.[38] Whereas the Berlin graffiti were swiftly removed by city authorities, the flag in Vienna stayed in place since the wall does not form part of the memorial and was reportedly painted on the orders of its owner, the former Czech foreign minister Karel Schwarzenberg.[39] In Brno, Czechia, a city spokesperson was quoted as saying: "We do not see any reason why we should quickly remove such expressions of solidarity with Ukraine."[40]

These Red Army memorials had been erected at the very end of the Second World War or in the immediate postwar decades, deliberately entangling commemoration and geopolitics. In the Putin era, additional monuments to Russian and Soviet military heroes from different ages have appeared in places ranging from China through Israel to South-Eastern Europe and the United States. Installed by both Russian and local actors, they usually serve as tokens of affinity with Russia and the Soviet or Russian imperial past.[41] Such monuments also became targets of symbolic interventions in the aftermath of the February 2022 invasion. In March 2022, for example, two such incidents occurred in Greece: in Athens, someone painted the word "Azov" (presumably referring to the eponymous Ukrainian regiment) on a memorial for Soviet soldiers who joined

37 Presseservice_RN (@PresseserviceRN), "(1/3) In #Berlin wurde das Sowjetische Ehrenmal im Treptower Park geschändet. Mehrere Teile des Ensembles wurde mit Farbe und Parolen beschmiert. Hintergrund scheint der Krieg in der Ukraine, insbesondere mutmaßliche Kriegsverbrechen in Bucha zu sein. #B0704, Twitter, April 7, 2022, 12:06pm, https://twitter.com/PresseserviceRN/status/1512008808222048257; "Berlin: Weltkriegspanzer am Sowjetischen Ehrenmal mit Ukrainefahnen verhüllt," *Der Spiegel*, March 30, 2022, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/berlin-weltkriegspanzer-am-sowjetischen-ehrenmal-mit-ukraine-fahnen-verhuellt-a-bebf8d6a-36c2-49f3-b5a1-147b21b968fd.

38 Aneta Zachová, Krassen Nikolov, and Michal Hudec, "Soviet War Memorials Take a Hit across Central and Eastern Europe," www.euractiv.com, March 14, 2022, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/soviet-war-memorials-take-a-hit-across-central-and-eastern-europe/.

39 "Mauer am Wiener Schwarzenbergplatz mit ukrainischen Farben bemalt," *Vienna Online*, January 3, 2022, https://www.vienna.at/mauer-am-wiener-schwarzenbergplatz-mit-ukrainischen-farben-bemalt/7310916.

40 Zachová, Nikolov, and Hudec, "Soviet War Memorials Take a Hit."

41 Gabowitsch, "What Has Happened to Soviet War Memorials," 202–3.

the Greek partisans in the Second World War.[42] In a separate case, someone threw paint at a recent statue of eighteenth-century Russian admiral Fedor Ushakov on the island of Corfu.[43]

Inside Ukraine, beyond the territories occupied by Russia, there was also a new wave of monument removal and attacks on monuments.[44] Its main targets were statues associated with Russian imperial control over Ukraine. This included first and foremost Soviet-era statues celebrating the "friendship and unity" between the peoples of Russia and Ukraine. In Pereiaslav, Kyiv region, for example, the local authorities decided to remove a centrally located monument to the 300th anniversary of the "reunification" of Ukraine and Russia, a late Stalinist project completed in 1954. The monument's base had previously been covered with the names of Ukrainian cities ravaged by the Russian invaders.[45] In Kyiv, a 1981 monument to two workers symbolizing Ukrainian-Russian friendship was removed from under the Arch of Friendship Between the Peoples.[46] The Three Sisters monument in Sen'kivka near the Ukrainian-Russian-Belarusian tripoint, built in 1975, was likewise slated for dismantling by a May 12, 2022, decision of the Chernihiv regional government.[47]

Monuments to individuals associated with Russian dominance were also targeted. One prominent example was an equestrian statue of the Russian general Aleksandr Suvorov, who had famously led the capture of the Ottoman fortress in Izmaïl in Bessarabia, conquering it for Catherine II.

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42 "Zhiteli Afin proveli stikhiinyi miting u pamiatnika sovetskim voinam," *RIA Novosti*, March 20, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220320/miting-1779145907.html.

43 "Vandaly oskvernili pamiatnik admiralu Ushakovu v Gretsii," *RIA Novosti*, March 26, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220326/pamyatnik-1780239271.html.

44 This topic would warrant another book, and we cannot do it full justice here. For further discussion, in addition to the issue of *Kunsttexte* cited above, see Mischa Gabowitsch, "Monuments in Times of War. Ukraine's Monumentscape since February 2022," *Eurozine*, April 6, 2023, https://www.eurozine.com/monuments-in-times-of-war, as well as the video recording of a panel titled "Decoloniality in Ukraine: Is there still a place for a 'Soviet soldier' in historic [sic] memory?" organized by Tatiana Kochubinska at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden on December 1, 2022: https://www.skd.museum/programm/decoloniality-in-ukraine.

45 "U Pereiaslavi znesly monument do 300-richchia 'vozziednannia' z Rosiieiu," *5 kanal*, July 7, 2022, https://www.5.ua/regiony/u-pereiaslavi-znesly-monument-do-300-richchia-vozziednannia-z-rosiieiu-281890.html.

46 t.me/vitaliy_klitschko/1378, April 26, 2022. On earlier discussions surrounding the monument, see Olha Martyniuk, "Was bedeutet die 'Entrussifizierung' ukrainischer Städte?," *ostBLOG Spezial: Russlands Krieg gegen die Ukraine* (blog), June 5, 2022, https://ukraine2022.ios-regensburg.de/namen01.

47 Roman Petrenko, "Monument 'Try sestry' na kordoni Ukrainy, RF ta Bilorusi likviduiut'," *Ukraïns'ka pravda*, May 12, 2022, https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/05/12/7345740/.

Cast from melted Turkish cannons, the monument was initially installed on Russian initiative in the Romanian town of Dumbrăveni in a location where Suvorov had greeted his soldiers after a victorious battle. In 1916, it was transported to Odesa. In 1945, the Soviet authorities installed it in Izmaïl to mark the one-year anniversary of their reconquest of Izmaïl and Bessarabia from Romania. Attacks on the monument began in May 2022. After someone threw red paint on the statue in late May, the authorities swiftly had it cleaned, yet in October the municipal council voted to have the statue transported to a museum; it was removed on December 1.[48] In Odesa, the municipal council similarly decided to have the local Suvorov statue (a 2012 copy of the one in Izmaïl) as well as a 1900 monument to the Founders of Odesa, including Catherine II, removed from their central locations.[49] The decisions had overwhelming support from council members, even though they were not entirely uncontroversial. On the one hand, Suvorov and Catherine undoubtedly symbolized Russian imperial rule over the Ukrainian lands. On the other hand, Odesa's very existence and Izmaïl's inclusion in Ukraine were inextricably linked with the Russian imperial past. In this way, the situation echoed the dilemma that had earlier accompanied the removal of Soviet war memorials from those regions in western Poland that had been transferred from Germany as a result of the Second World War.[50] Yet unlike the Polish case, where the decision to remove those monuments had been enforced from Warsaw, in Ukraine removal was decided locally.

A related wave of monument removal and defacement targeted monuments to Aleksandr Pushkin, memorialized ubiquitously during the Soviet period as a Russian national poet.[51] Not only was Pushkin targeted as the centerpiece of a cult transporting Russian cultural imperi-

48 https://t.me/stranaua/78093, December 1, 2022.

49 On the decision procedure and removal process see the following posts in the official Telegram channel of the Odesa authorities, see https://t.me/odesacityofficial/10947, September 18, 2022; https://t.me/odesacityofficial/11385, October 3, 2022; https://t.me/odesacityofficial/12378, November 8, 2022; https://t.me/odesacityofficial/13800, December 28, 2022.

50 Nancy Waldmann, "Koniec przeobrażeń? Dekomunizacja przestrzeni publicznej w Polsce na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych w latach 2016–2017—wybrane przykłady," *Rocznik Ziem Zachodnich* 2 (2018): 714–66.

51 For an overview, see Polina Horlach, "'Pushkinopad' prodovzhuietʹsia: u Kyievi demontuiutʹ shche odyn pamʹiatnyk Pushkinu," Suspilʹne. *Novyny*, January 6, 2023, https://suspilne.media/494317-puskinopad-prodovzuetsa-mer-kieva-vitalij-klicko-pidtrimav-peticiu-prodemontaz-pamatnika-rosijskomu-poetu. On pre-2022 Ukrainian debates about a perceived Pushkinfall, see Sophie Charlotte Pinkham, "Pushkin for President: Russian Lit-

alism; many Ukrainians also faulted the poet for using his own writings to promote ideas of Russia's cultural superiority and its right to rule over others. The well-known writer Serhii Zhadan, one of the most prominent voices of this kind, made a series of selfie photos in front of Pushkin statues, most of which would disappear soon thereafter.[52]

Here, too, iconoclasm was not unproblematic—in November 2022, a majority of those polled on the question in Kharkiv said they would have preferred the local Pushkin monument to stay, either unaltered (44 percent) or with an additional panel providing context (10 percent).[53] (Attacks on Pushkin monuments as symbols of Russification have been a recurrent feature in the history of Ukrainian nationalism; thus, in October 1904, a group called "Defense of Ukraine" unsuccessfully attempted to blow up the recently installed Pushkin bust in Kharkiv.[54])

These acts of iconoclasm echoed cases from other places and times where attacks on public statues erected under a previous imperial regime did not occur immediately upon independence, but rather responded to challenges to a country's new-found sovereignty. Thus, in Poznań, in newly independent Poland, during the night of April 3/4, 1919, local residents toppled monuments installed under Prussian rule. Happening almost five months after Poland formally recovered its independence, the iconoclastic spree came in response to discussions at the Paris Peace Conference questioning Poland's claim to Gdańsk and Eastern Pomerania.[55] The same year, a Fokker biplane was mounted on the pedestal of a toppled statue of German emperor Wilhelm I in Strasbourg, a city recently recovered from Germany by France, just as demolished Tsarist statues were simultaneously being replaced with new makeshift monuments in Soviet Russia—the same as started happening in Ukraine in 2014.[56]

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erary Cults in the Transition from Communism." (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2019), 279–81, https://dx.doi.org/10.7916/d8-tp8v-sa82.

52 "Zhadan i sobaky: shcho trapliaietʹsia z pamiatnykamy Pushkinu pislia selfi pysʹmennyka," *Vogue*, November 17, 2022, https://vogue.ua/article/culture/knigi/zhadan-i-sobaki-shcho-traplyayetsya-z-pam-yatnikami-pushkinu-pislya-selfi-pismennika-50537.html.

53 Homanyuk and Danylenko, "Symvolichnyi prostir mista."

54 Fedir Turchenko, "'Kharkivsʹkyi proekt' Mykoly Mikhnovsʹkoho," *Naukovi pratsi istorychnoho fakulʹtetu Zaporizʹkoho derzhavnoho universytetu* XV (2002): 23–25. We thank Serge Lunin for this reference.

55 Praczyk, "Émotions en action," 117.

56 Regarding Strasbourg, see Praczyk, 117. It should be noted that in the case of Strasbourg, a statue of the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was left intact. See Praczyk, 124.

In Ukraine in 2022, military monuments were also affected—less systematically and often in several stages, though pressure for removal increased over time.[57]

The first stage was often to throw paint at a monument. An exhibition of works by Ukrainian graphic artist Oleksandr Kom'iakhov, which opened on Independence Square in Kyiv in November 2021 to celebrate the eight anniversary of the Revolution of Dignity, included a comic strip about a couple on a motorcycle shooting a paint gun at the Kyiv statue of Soviet World War II-era general Nikolai Vatutin (the monument was later removed by official decision).[58] Following the Russian invasion, such paint attacks became common occurrences, usually targeting statues of individual military leaders or heroes, such as the Izmaïl statue of Aleksandr Suvorov mentioned above. As late as June 2023, several busts of Twice Heroes of the Soviet Union in Kyiv's Park of Partisan Glory had their faces painted red by unknown protesters, who also painted slurs such as "chekist" and "occupier" on the pedestals.[59] Both the Vatutin monument and the busts were built under Stalin in the early postwar years.[60] A 1982 stele celebrating Kyiv's status as a "Hero City" lost its Order of Lenin.[61] In Uman', Cherkasy region, a similar bust of locally born war hero Ivan Cherniakhovs'kyi simply saw the medal on its pedestal draped in black—another first-stage way of dealing with unwanted Soviet symbolism.[62] Another possible first step was to paint the number of the decommunization law from 2015 (317 VIII) on a monument's pedestal, as happened, for example, to several monuments in Poltava.[63]

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57 A useful journalistic overview showing the situation as of the early summer of 2022 is Anastasiia Holubieva, "Viina i pam'iatnyky: v Ukraini znosiat' Pushkina, a na okupovanykh terytoriiakh povertaiut' Lenina," *BBC News Ukraïna*, June 24, 2022, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-61921265.

58 Photo by Mykola Homanyuk. For more on the exhibition, see "Na maidani Nezalezhnosti u Kyievi prezentuvaly vulychnu vystavku 'Maľovana istoriia Maidanu,'" Natsional'nyi memorial'nyi kompleks Heroïv Nebesnoï Sotni—Muzei Revoliutsiï Hidnosti, November 22, 2021, https://maidanmuseum.org/uk/node/1745.

59 "Chekisty i palachi: v Kieve razrisovali biusty sovetskikh partizan," *Apostrof Kyïv*, June 29, 2023, https://apostrophe.ua/news/kyiv/2023-06-29/chekistyi-i-palachi-v-kieve-razrisovali-byustyi-sovetskih-partizan-foto/299901.

60 On the construction of the Vatutin monument, see Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Citizens: Everyday Politics in the Wake of Total War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014), 60–63.

61 Mykola Homanyuk's photo.

62 Mykola Homanyuk's photo.

63 Mykola Homanyuk's photo.

The second stage was partial removal, which targeted not only such monuments to individuals but also generic war memorials and was often followed somewhat later by complete removal. One example is the Victory Monument in Chernivtsi, unveiled in 1946 by Leonid Brezhnev, then the chief political officer of the Transcarpathian Military District.[64] In August 2022, the bronze statue of a Red Army soldier that was part of the memorial was removed at the behest of the local authorities, leaving the main obelisk intact.[65] Less than a month later, the obelisk was gone too.[66]

In Transcarpathian Mukachevo, the local authorities removed a tank monument installed in 1969 as part of a wave of new war monuments installed in Western Ukraine following the suppression of the Prague Spring. In doing so, they stressed that the tank was not involved in the Second World War, and commentators mentioned that its barrel had been aimed at the center of the town.[67]

Yet war memorials also disappeared from public space in places where they had previously been seen as being closely tied to a local identity. In Dnipro, in early January 2023, a wave of iconoclasm saw the removal, among other statues, of a monument to Soviet war heroes Efim Pushkin and Aleksandr Matrosov.[68] Pushkin was a general who had defended Dnipro (then Dnipropetrovs'k) against the Germans in 1941 and was later killed in action near Mykolaïv. Matrosov was among the most revered martyrs of the Soviet war cult, the most famous of the many Soviet soldiers reported to have blocked a German machine gun with their bodies. According to his official biography, he was born in Dnipro. So was the

64 Central State Film, Photo, and Sound Archive of Ukraine (TsDKFFA), newsreel no. 284 (1946).

65 Alla Podliesna, "U Chernivtsiakh prybraly pam'iatnyk nevidomomu soldatu na Sobornii ploshchi," *Suspil'ne: Novyny*, August 12, 2022, https://suspilne.media/270300-u-cernivcah-pribrali-pamatnik-nevidomomu-soldatu-na-sobornij-plosi/.

66 "U Chernivtsiakh demontuiut' reshtky monumentu Peremohy," *Molodyi bukovynets'*, September 7, 2022, https://molbuk.ua/index.php?newsid=266799.

67 "U Mukachevi demontuvaly pam'iatnyk radians'komu tanku," Mukachivs'ka mis'ka rada, April 11, 2022, https://mukachevo-rada.gov.ua/news/u-mukachevi-demontuvali-pamyatnik-radyanskomu-tanku; Iryna Balachuk, "U Mukachevi demontuvaly radians'kyi tank," *Ukraïns'ka pravda*, April 11, 2022, https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/04/11/7338747/; "V ukrainskom Mukacheve demontirovali pamiatnik sovetskomu tanku," *RIA Novosti*, April 11, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220411/ukraina-1782890909.html.

68 "V Dnepre snesli pamiatnik Aleksandru Matrosovu raboty Vucheticha," *Radio Svoboda*, January 4, 2023, https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-dnepre-snesli-pamyatnik-aleksandru-matrosovu-raboty-vucheticha/32207478.html.

author of the statue and the most famous and controversial creator of Soviet war memorials, Evgenii Vuchetich.

In Ukraine, as in other countries, the events of February 2022 precipitated decisions that had long been in the making. Thus, in April 2022, the city government of Drohobych, L'viv region, organized a "clean Thursday." Under the guise of "de-Russification" and "getting rid of evil communist spirits" (*komunistychnoï nechysti*), they dismantled most of the local eternal flame memorial, following a consultation procedure that had started well before the large-scale invasion.[69]

Whereas in these cases removal was sanctioned and organized by the local authorities and thus bore the stamp of democratic legitimacy, there were also instances of conflict and unsanctioned destruction. In May 2022, an unidentified group of Ukrainian soldiers used a truck to topple a statue of medieval grand prince Aleksandr Nevskii in Kharkiv.[70] A figure central to Russian war memory for centuries and revered as a saint by the Orthodox Church, Nevskii had no connection with Kharkiv, founded hundreds of years after his death, although the statue was installed in 2004 ostensibly to mark the city's 350th anniversary. While the removal was unsanctioned, a representative of Ukraine's Institute of National Memory later justified it.[71]

In Mykolaïv, on October 19, 2022, a monument to police staff who died in the line of duty, including in the Great Patriotic War, was erected in the city center in 1977 thanks to donations from police officers. As part of the post-Euromaidan decommunization wave, by 2016, some local activists as well as the Institute of National Memory were campaigning to have it removed, referring to its local nickname as a "monument to Chekists" and the Civil War-era *budenovka* hat on the statue that they argued symbolized Communist terror against Ukrainians. After years of inconclu-

69 "Derusyfikatsiia v dii: u Chystyi chetver Drohobych pozbuvsia komunistychnoï nechysti," Drohobyts'ka Mis'ka Rada, April 21, 2022, https://drohobych-rada.gov.ua/деpусифікація-в-дії-у-чистий-четвер-др/.

70 Olena Cherneta, "U Kharkovi znesly pam'iatnyk Oleksandru Nevs'komu," *Vgorode*, May 19, 2022, https://kh.vgorode.ua/ukr/news/sobytyia/a1206836-u-kharkovi-znesli-pamjatnik-oleksandru-nevskomu-video.

71 "Simvol 'sily russkogo oruzhiia': v UINP prokommentirovali snos pamiatnika Aleksandru Nevskomu v Khar'kove," *New Voice Khar'kov*, May 19, 2022, https://nv.ua/kharkiv/pochemu-snesli-pamyatnik-aleksandru-nevskomu-novosti-harkova-50243476.html. On the role of Alexander Nevskii in Russian memory politics through the ages, see Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, *Aleksandr Nevskij: Heiliger, Fürst, Nationalheld: eine Erinnerungsfigur im russischen kulturellen Gedächtnis (1263–2000)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004).

sive debates, on October 13, 2022, a group of activists for the center-right *Narodnyi Rukh Ukrainy* party arrived with a crane truck to remove the monument. They were hindered by a group of retired policemen who, while stressing their Ukrainian patriotism, argued that the statue was a grassroots monument that honored Ukrainians who died serving their city and was important for commemorative ceremonies. Six days later, unknown attackers blew up the monument.[72] (The mayor's office later promised to replace it with a new monument after the end of the war.[73]) Soon thereafter, another Mykolaïv monument was similarly blown up: a Motherland statue that was part of a Second World War memorial.[74]

In Mykolaïv, destruction happened under the cover of night. Elsewhere, iconoclasts made sure to document the act of demolition, such as the Odesite activist Dem'ian Hanul, who had himself filmed destroying the relief on a monument to Grigorii Kotovskii, a Civil War-era military commander active in Moldova and Ukraine who became the object of a posthumous cult in the Soviet era.[75]

Preservationists found themselves in a difficult position. The *De Ne De* association of artists and curators had long campaigned for a more nuanced approach to Soviet statuary, distinguishing between Russian or generic Soviet monuments on the one hand and Ukrainian Soviet heritage on the other, in an attempt to reappropriate the Soviet heritage from the Russian Federation. Unlike monument defenders who sought to downplay the Sovietness of monuments, *De Ne De* argued that Soviet-era monuments needed to be preserved precisely because they were Soviet in order to teach how propaganda works. "Decommunization," they argued, "is easy to start

72 "U Mykolaievi khochut' znesty pam'iatnyk 'militsioneru' na Sadovii: zakhyshchaty monument pryishly veterany MVS," *Novyny N*, October 13, 2022, https://novosti-n.org/ua/news/U-Mykolayevi-hochut-znesty-pam-yatnyk-miliczioneru-na-Sadovij-zahyshhaty-monument-pryjshly-veterany-MVS-253033; "Z'iavylysia foto ta video pidirvanoho pam'iatnyka 'zahyblym militsioneram,'" *Novyny N*, October 20, 2022, https://novosti-n.org/ua/news/Z-yavylysya-foto-ta-video-pidirvanogo-pam-yatnyka-zagyblym-miliczioneram--253546.

73 Iuliia Tkach, "Posle voiny v Nikolaeve ustanoviat novyi pamiatnik pogibshim pravookhraniteliam,—Lukov," *Nikvesti*, October 31, 2022, https://nikvesti.com/ru/news/public/259100.

74 "U Mykolaievi pidirvaly pam'iatnyk 'Skorbotna maty,'" 0512—Sait mista Mykolaieva, November 3, 2022, https://www.0512.com.ua/news/3490285/u-mikolaevi-pidirvali-pamatnik-skorbotna-mati-foto.

75 Dem'ian Hanul, "Dekomunizatsiia vid mene," Facebook, April 18, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/GanulDemian/posts/pfbid022uSzPtJMF2A7JatS1PV3CjmL3ss5ZsrK4sCwMtiKPgwevJok7W4bJSoQEsG36UV2l.

but impossible to finish." Given the Russian carnage, however, they found it impossible to keep protesting against the removal of Soviet monuments.[76]

Other critics noted that the money and efforts spent on decommunizing public space should rather go to defending the country: rather than wasting 28 million hryvnia on removing the Soviet coat of arms from the Motherland statue in Kyiv, some of them wrote, decommunizers should spend that money on defending the country.[77] Against this, Anton Drobovych, the head of Ukraine's Institute of National Remembrance, argued that symbolic decommunization was itself a contribution to national defense. He argued that changing the symbol on the Motherland figure's shield would be a reasonable middle course between unconditional reverence for all built heritage *qua* heritage and the radical drive to destroy everything, and that it was a way to appropriate a symbol of Ukraine's losses in the Second World War. "European culture," he claimed, "features hundreds of examples of prominent monuments of the past being altered, reshaped, adapted, and reconstructed, for that is a sign that a community is mature to the point where it takes control over its own symbolic space and feels able to change and define it."[78]

Drobovych was thus advocating to subject the country's most recognizable war memorial to the very kind of appropriation that, as we have described, had been happening for years in rural Ukraine. This type of appropriation has so far saved most rural memorials from the post-2022 wave of iconoclasm. Indeed, the vast majority of cases in which war memorials were removed, with or without an official decision, were in cities. For the reasons outlined in chapter 2, rural memorials have become much more domesticated, preventing them from being reinterpreted as foreign objects. Few of the memorials located in most of Ukraine's almost 30,000 villages disappeared.[79] Even in regions of Western Ukraine where iconoclasm was particularly radical in the larger cities, the increasingly

76 The quote and the other observations in this paragraph are from Zhenya Molyar's presentation at the *Documenting Ukraine* workshop at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna on February 8, 2023.

77 See, for example: Anna Kudeliuk, "'Tiuninh na krovi': chomu Ukraïna ryzykue prohraty u viini proty okupantiv," *Znai.UA*, July 16, 2023, https://znaj.ua/society/462011-tyuning-na-krovi-chomu-ukrajina-rizikuye-prograti-u-viyni-proti-okupantiv.

78 Anton Drobovych, "Symvoly voiuiut' i peremahaiut'," *Ukraïns'ka pravda*, July 20, 2023, https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2023/07/20/255490/.

79 For the source of this number, see "Kil'kist' administratyvno-terytorial'nykh odynyts' za rehionamy Ukraïny na 1 sichnia 2016 roku," Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky Ukraïny, 2016, https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2016/ds/ator/ator2016_u.htm.

frequent calls to remove war memorials in rural areas often met with resistance from local residents.[80] The Second World War memorial in the village of Lysychovo in Transcarpathia provides a striking example. In April 2023, an out-of-town activist wrote to the village council, demanding to have the monument removed. The council's response to the activist states that it is a memorial honoring

> warriors from our village who died or went missing in action in the period from 1941 to 1945 rather than a "monument to Soviet soldiers"…. By dismantling a monument to warriors from our village, we would devalue not only their role in combating fascism but their very lives.
>
> The question of dismantling the monument was put for discussion before the residents of our village, and they unanimously took the view that participants in the war of 1941–45 are on a par with soldiers who died during the full-scale Russian invasion [since] February 24, 2022, protecting the freedom and independence of our Fatherland.[81]

Similar acts of resistance to removal have been recorded in Galician regions, reputed to be particularly fervent in getting rid of war memorials from the Soviet period.[82]

New and renewed memorials

Conversely, the war has also led to the creation of new memorials. In free Ukraine, new makeshift memorials began to spring up for soldiers and civilians killed by the Russian onslaught. Walls or banners displaying names and/or portraits of the fallen appeared in different cities. Cemeteries were bursting at the seams due to the large number of

80 For cases where rural war memorials were removed or altered, see the Facebook page of the *Dekomunizatsiia. Ukraïna* group, which campaigns for such removal: www.facebook.com/UADecolonization.

81 https://t.me/stranaua/101383, April 22, 2023.

82 For examples, see Pershyi Zakhidnyi, "Hromada na Ľvivshchyni proty znesennia radians'koho pam'iatnyka," Youtube video, 3:49, June 22, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPJWm37IKog; "Na Prikarpat'e zhiteli dvukh sel otkazalis' snosit' pamiatniki sovetskim soldatam," *Strana.UA*, December 1, 2023, https://ctrana.media/news/451864-v-ivano-frankovskoj-oblasti-v-dvukh-selakh-otkazalis-snosit-pamjatniki-sovetskim-soldatam.html.

new graves that needed to be dug for both soldiers and civilians killed in the war.[83] Ukrainian flags were often used at cemeteries to mark soldiers' burial places, turning old and new cemeteries across Ukraine into seas of blue and yellow, with occasional sprinkles of other countries' flags for foreign volunteers. This was in contrast to the occupied territories, where at least in some cases the Russians reportedly prevented people from burying Ukrainian (or even Russian) soldiers in cemeteries and the bodies had to be interred in private gardens instead.[84]

As the Ukrainian army retook territories from Russia, memorials started to arise to honor those killed in the Russian onslaught. As early as April 2022, Volodymyr Zelens'kyi announced that the destroyed bridge linking Irpin' and Kyiv would be turned into a memorial for civilians killed in the city.[85] Six months later, a Kyiv architectural firm proposed a project that would involve preserving the destroyed bridge next to a new reconstructed one, sparking debate on whether memorializing trauma for all to see in their daily commute was appropriate.[86] In the meantime, a number of grassroots memorials had sprung up around the bridge. One of them involved a canvas on which anyone could write the names of those killed; another included objects that had belonged to adults and children who died in Russian shelling while trying to flee Irpin'.[87] An initiative by artists from Ukraine and the US involved painting sunflowers on war ruins around Irpin', such as a graveyard of burnt-out cars at the entrance

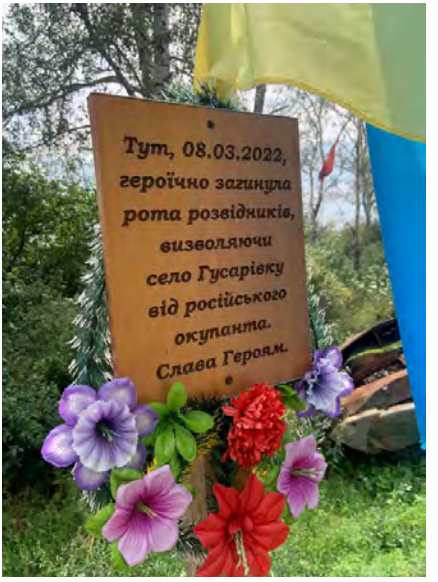
83 Jan Heidtmann, "Zu viele tote Helden," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 27, 2022, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/ukraine-lwiw-gefallene-russland-1.5573385.

84 See this report about Trostianet's, Sumy region, which was occupied for about a month at the very beginning of the large-scale invasion, by the regional governor: "'Kakoe otnoshenie k russkim? Nikakoe. Eto izgoi na tysiachu let': Sumskaia oblasť Ukrainy uzhe pochti mesiats oboroniaetsia ot rossiiskoi armii—khotia nakhoditsia priamo na granitse. Ee glava Dmitrii Zhivitskii rasskazal 'Meduze,' kak ei eto udaetsia," *Meduza*, March 22, 2022, https://meduza.io/feature/2022/03/22/kakoe-otnoshenie-k-russkim-nikakoe-eto-izgoi-na-tysyachu-let.

85 "Zelens'kyi anonsuvav memorial'nyi kompleks na zhadku pro mist v Irpeni i perezhytu 'bezhluzdu navalu' rosiian," *Ukraïns'ka pravda*, April 17, 2022, https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/04/17/7340167/.

86 Karyna Bondarenko, "Na zruinovanomu mostu cherez Irpin' planuiut' zbuduvaty memorial: proiekt otrymav bahato krytyky," *TSN*, October 7, 2022, https://kyiv.tsn.ua/na-zruynovanomu-mostu-cherez-irpin-planuyut-zbuduvati-memorial-proyekt-otrimav-bagato-kritiki-foto-2174806.html.

87 "'Boialas', chto povsiudu budet dukh smerti. Dumala, zhit' zdes' ne smogu. No smogla': Reportazh 'Meduzy' iz Buchi—o tom, chto seichas proiskhodit v gorode, gde rossiiskie soldaty ubivali, nasilovali i pytali zhitelei," *Meduza*, October 27, 2022, https://meduza.io/feature/2022/10/27/boyalas-chto-povsyudu-budet-duh-smerti-dumala-zhit-zdes-ne-smogu-no-smogla.



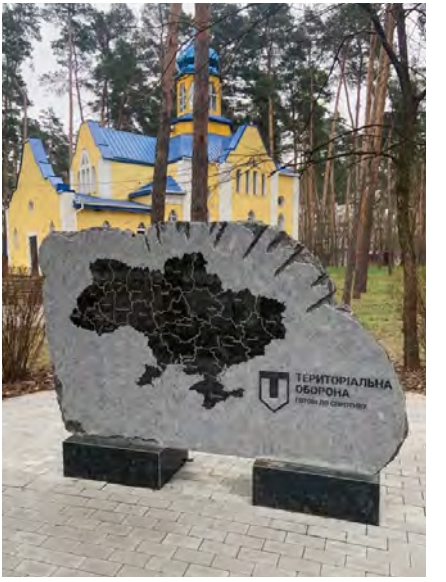


Figure 6.2. Memorial to fallen soldiers of the Ukrainian Armed Forces with the inscription "Members of a reconnaissance company died here on March 8, 2022, while liberating Husarivka from the Russian occupiers. Glory to the Heroes!" Village of Husarivka, Kharkiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2023.

Figure 6.3. Monument to the Territorial Defense. Irpin', Kyiv region. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, January 2023.

to the city. The initiative aimed to raise money for reconstruction by selling non-fungible tokens (NFTs).[88]

After deoccupation, Ukrainians sometimes simply removed the traces of Russian monumental propaganda. Thus, the Glory of Ukraine memorial in Kherson, which turned into a pro-Russian Second World War memorial under the occupation, was painted a neutral gray.[89] More often, however, they used existing memorials, both in the liberated territories and elsewhere in Ukraine, to celebrate liberation and mourn their losses. In Kyiv, the steles celebrating the World War II Hero Cities were transformed: steles dedicated to cities in Russia were rededicated to Ukrainian cities under assault since 2022. A poster informed visitors, for example, that President Zelens'kyi had declared Kherson a Hero City of Ukraine in March 2022. To

88 Theo Farrant, "Artists Paint Sunflowers on Destroyed Vehicles in War-Torn Irpin," *Euronews*, August 18, 2022, https://www.euronews.com/culture/2022/08/18/flowers-for-hope-artists-paint-sunflowers-on-destroyed-vehicles-in-war-torn-irpin. Also see https://www.instagram.com/flowersforhopeart.

89 Our sources here and in the rest of this section are Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork and photos.

these posters, in turn, ordinary people sometimes attached portraits of individual fallen soldiers.

In Ivankiv, Kyiv region, a black-and-red sports fan scarf with the words "Glory to Ukraine" was attached to an armored vehicle installed as part of a memorial to the Soviet war in Afghanistan. In Chornobaïvka, Kherson region, a wreath made of ribbons and artificial flowers was woven around the head of a grieving mother statue at a Great Patriotic War memorial, and the acronym for "Ukrainian Armed Forces" was sprayed on the memorial's main statue, an abstract flag composition. In Kherson, a Soviet emblem on a supply truck installed on a pedestal in 2013 as a World War II memorial was painted over with the colors of the Ukrainian flag.

Other memorials in liberated places were also subjected to this kind of spontaneous decommunization. In Oleksandrivka, Voznesens'kyi district, Mykolaïv region, a large, formerly red banner in the hands of a soldier statue was painted grey.

In some places, improvised standalone memorials marked the spots of Russian attacks. At the Babyn Iar Holocaust memorial site in Kyiv, a new plaque informed visitors that "On March 1, 2022, six persons—five adults and one child—died from a missile attack on Babyn Iar" (see figure 6.4). In Kherson, the sites of the stolen monuments to Admiral Ushakov and General Suvorov were also turned into Ukrainian war

Figure 6.4. Memorial at the explosion site in Babyn Iar in Kyiv. The inscription reads "On March 1, 2022, six persons—five adults and one child—died from a missile attack on Babyn Iar." Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, April 2023.

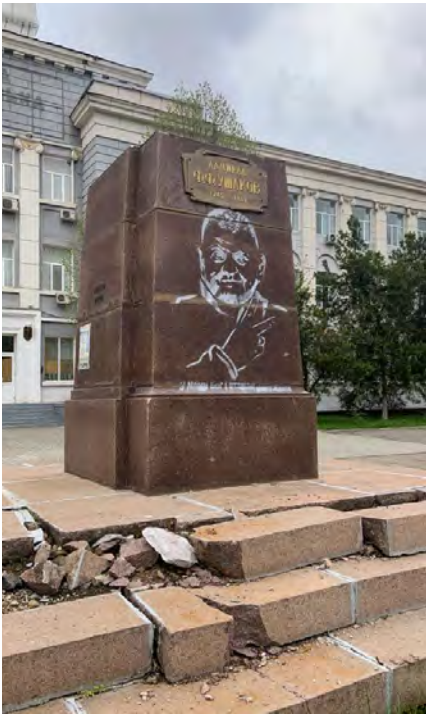


Figure 6.5. Graffiti of the silhouette of Valerii Zaluzhnyi, commander-in-chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces, drawn on the pedestal of the stolen monument to Admiral Fedor Ushakov. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, June 2023.

memorials. Someone drew the silhouette of Ukrainian commander-in-chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi on one side of Ushakov's pedestal and stenciled the words "Death to the Russians [*smert' rusni*]" on another side (see figure 6.5). Stenciled writing praising the Ukrainian Armed Forces and announcing the return of Crimea were applied to the pedestal of the Suvorov statue, which now supported a Ukrainian flag.

In turn, the makeshift memorials that had sprung up during the occupation were turned more permanent. Thus, in Kherson, the simple crosses that had marked the site of resistance by Territorial Defense forces on March 1 in the Lilac Grove (see figure 6.6) were supplemented with other commemorabilia such as decorative cloths and wreaths, and a more permanent granite memorial was erected at the site (see figures 6.7, 6.8). In December 2022, former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko announced that he would fund a competition to turn the site into a memorial of Ukraine's unbreakable fighting spirit to be known across the world.[90]

In keeping with the post-Soviet culture of hybrid war memorials, the names of those killed in 2022–23 were added to memorials dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, the Anti-Terror Operation, and other military conflicts.

Another type of new war memorial, following a Soviet precedent that was especially popular at the very end of the Second World War and in the first post-war years, were exhibitions of trophy military equipment.

90 "Poroshenko oholosyv konkurs na proiekt pam'iatnykam heroiam Buzkovoho haiu u Khersoni," *LB.ua*, December 31, 2022, https://lb.ua/society/2022/12/31/541038_poroshenko_ogolosiv_konkurs_proiekt.html.

Figure 6.6. Memorial to fallen members of the Territorial Defense with the inscription "This memorial sign marks the site where fighters of the 124th Brigade of the Territorial Defense of Ukraine's Armed Forces fell while defending Kherson from the Russian invaders in February–March 2022. From fellow members of the 124th Brigade and the Themis volunteer unit." Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, May 2022. Lilac Grove, Kherson.

Figures 6.7. Memorial to fallen members of the Territorial Defense forces. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, April 2023. Lilac Grove, Kherson.

Figure 6.8. Memorial to fallen members of the Territorial Defense forces. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, April 2023. Lilac Grove, Kherson.

At the Konev Heights memorial in Solonytsivka near Kharkiv, captured Russian vehicles and missiles were added to the German tanks on display in memory of the Second World War.[91]

Yet standalone memorials to the ongoing war also started appearing soon after liberation. At first, these too were improvised: for example, a board with a message supporting the Ukrainian Armed Forces written in blue and yellow chalk. Yet more permanent memorials did not take long to appear. In Oleksandrivka, Snihurivs'kyi district, Mykolaïv region, this took the form of white steles symbolizing a flame that enclosed the silhouette of a soldier in full body armor; this was flanked by portraits of the fallen and Ukrainian flags.

91 Mykola Homanyuk's field observations on site.

Chapter 7
Dates, Practices, Symbols

The commemorative calendar

As we have already seen, by far the most important uses of war memorials were as focal points for commemorative ceremonies of various kinds, especially but not exclusively centered on the Great Patriotic War.

In the occupied territories, the new administrators tried to Russify commemoration, thereby turning it into a tool of Russification. They displayed Russian symbols at ceremonies on dates that were already observed in Ukraine and marked new dates from the official Russian holiday cycle. They introduced new commemorative practices from Russia or amplified their use where they had already been taken up by Ukrainians in previous years. They also celebrated rituals symbolically linking the newly "liberated" territories with Russia.

The association between war memorials and commemorative rituals is in line with previous practice in Ukraine, Russia, and other post-Soviet countries, as well as among Russian-speaking communities across the world. Victory Day celebrations in particular have taken place annually at war memorials in countries that had a Soviet military presence during or after World War II, from China to Norway. Both grassroots actors and state agencies from Russia and elsewhere have initiated new memorials to Red Army soldiers in places with large numbers of residents from the former Soviet Union, such as Israel or the United States. The plethora of new commemorative practices that have emerged in the post-Soviet period are likewise the result of a complex interaction between bottom-up initiatives and state authorities—primarily, but by no means exclusively Russian—with the state often co-opting successful grassroots practices into its own repertoire. Many such ceremonies and practices have

been studied, described, and analyzed in detail in recent years, particularly in two large-scale collaborative projects co-directed by one of the authors of this book.[1]

Following much public criticism of the official cult of the Great Patriotic War in the final years of *glasnost'* and a lull in official ceremonies, the Russian state took a renewed interest in war commemoration under President Boris Yeltsin from 1995 onward. The Putin regime increasingly positioned itself as the sole guardian of authentic war memory against supposed revisionists in other parts of the former Soviet empire. Conflicts surrounding Soviet war memorials and the associated commemorative ceremonies in countries ranging from Estonia, Moldova, or Georgia to Germany, Bulgaria, or Israel usually reflected local dynamics, such as Russian-speaking minorities seeking social status and recognition. The mainstream wariness, outright hostility, or indifference to such concerns created openings for Russian state agencies and media to step in and present participants as unqualified supporters of Russia's own mnemonic or geopolitical policies.

Ukraine has seen—mostly discursive, but occasionally violent[2]—conflicts around commemorative dates such as Victory Day (May 9). Just as in other post-Soviet countries, successive Ukrainian governments and parliaments have also amended the commemorative calendar inherited from Soviet times, both before and after the Euromaidan revolution and the 2014 Russian invasion. They instituted entirely new commemorative dates and modified the dates and names of old ones.

Thus, for example, in 1998, President Leonid Kuchma officially established the fourth Saturday in November as Holodomor Memorial Day. In 2015, a Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation on May 8 was added to the still-observed May 9, now officially titled Day of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War. (May 9 eventually lost its official status under a law that President Volodymyr Zelens'kyi signed in June 2023.)

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1 See in particular Mischa Gabowitsch, Cordula Gdaniec, and Ekaterina Makhotina, eds., *Kriegsgedenken als Event: Der 9. Mai 2015 im postsozialistischen Europa* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017); Mikhail Gabovich [Mischa Gabowitsch], ed., *Pamiatnik i prazdnik: Etnografiia Dnia Pobedy* (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020). For a full list of publications resulting from these projects, see "Victory Day: Sociology," https://gabowitsch.net/victoryday-2.

2 Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa, "Memory Events and Memory Wars: Victory Day in L'viv, 2011 through the Prism of Quantitative Analysis," in *Memory, Conflict and Social Media* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2013), 48–62; Ekaterina Shapiro-Obermair, *Geschichte performen: Öffentliches Gedenken an den Zweiten Weltkrieg im Zeichen des russisch-ukrainischen Krieges* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2024).

Such changes in the roster of a country's commemorative dates are entirely unexceptional.[3] The Soviet commemorative calendar, including the date, status, and designation of dates commemorating military conflicts or service branches, was altered multiple times throughout the USSR's existence. All of the Soviet Union's successor states instituted new holidays and scrapped old ones or changed their names and dates. Few countries have seen more such changes than Russia. In particular, Russia introduced a long register of Days of Military Glory of Russia, also known as Days of the Glory of Russian Arms. With varying degrees of fanfare, these dates celebrate assorted Russian military victories since the thirteenth century.

Still, in trying to bring the commemorative calendar and practices in the occupied territories in line with Russia's, the occupiers often presented their efforts as a return to a normal or natural state after years of artificial Ukrainianization. As one Russian news report about the annual celebration of the 1944 liberation of Lysychans'k, Luhans'k region, phrased it: "This year, the City Festival in Lysychans'k is special—after eight long years, residents could wish each other a happy holiday in their native Russian language, sing good old Soviet songs, and remember the true significance of this day."[4]

Russian-organized commemorative ceremonies at war memorials essentially belonged to four different categories, though alignment with Russia and the self-proclaimed Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics was central to all four.

The first were long-established dates for commemorating the Great Patriotic War, which have been celebrated in both Ukraine and Russia, albeit using different names. These include days commemorating the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany (May 9: Victory Day in Russia, the Day of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War in Ukraine, given that name in 2016 and abolished in 2023), the German attack on the Soviet Union (June 22: known as the Day of Sorrow and Tribute to the Victims of War in Ukraine and as Day of Remembrance and Sorrow in Russia),

3 Eviatar Zerubavel, "Calendars and History: A Comparative Study of the Social Organization of National Memory," in *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 315–38.

4 "Lisichansk otprazdnoval den' goroda," *Lugansk1*, March 9, 2022, http://lugansk1.info/132674-lisichansk-otprazdnoval-den-goroda.

and local liberation days commemorating the end of Nazi occupation in individual cities. May 8, the new Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation instituted in Ukraine in 2015 as part of an effort to Europeanize war commemoration, was not officially observed by the Russian-installed occupation administrations, though—just like in Russia—a number of ceremonies still took place on that day simply due to its proximity to May 9. In addition, Russian-sponsored ceremonies in the occupied territories took place on May 6, the Feast Day of Saint George according to the Julian calendar. Not least due to efforts by the Russian Orthodox Church, this date has become an additional occasion for war commemoration in the post-Soviet period. In occupied Ukraine, ceremonies on this date amply referenced the St. George's Ribbon and the (false) claim that fighting in the Second World War stopped on May 6. Spreading out celebrations in time also allowed a small number of officials to participate in multiple ceremonies over a period of several days.

The second category is comprised of generic days that celebrate particular categories of service members or victims. These include dates associated with specific branches of the armed forces, such as the Navy, Border Guards, or Airborne Forces. Russia has generally retained the Soviet-era dates for these celebrations, whereas in Ukraine they have been moved to other dates due mostly to changes in the structure of the armed forces. Thus, Border Guard Day, established in the Soviet Union in 1958 as one of a plethora of days honoring specific professional groups, was moved from May 28 to November 4 in 1991, the date Ukraine's Supreme Rada passed a law establishing a separate border guard service for the soon-to-be independent country. In 2018, the date was moved to April 30, though those who served in the Soviet-era Border Troops, then a division of the KGB, mostly continued to celebrate May 28. Airborne Forces Day is marked on August 2 in the Soviet and Russian tradition and associated in Russia with drunken debauchery by veterans of this service branch. In Ukraine, during a reorganization of the airborne troops in 2017, it was moved to November 21 to coincide with the feast day of Archangel Michael, the commander of the Heavenly Host in the Christian tradition. Navy Day was observed in the Soviet Union on the last Sunday of July since 1980. Russia has kept that date, whereas Ukraine moved it to the first Sunday in July in 2015. Conversely, post-Soviet Russia has also introduced a number of new commemorative dates that testify to the inflationary uses of commemoration since they often themselves refer back to commemora-

tive events rather than directly to military feats. Thus, in 2007, Russia established a Day of the Heroes of the Fatherland on December 9, referring back to the (misdated) day when Catherine II introduced the Order of St. George in 1769. Since 2014, the Russian commemorative calendar has also included a Day of the Unknown Soldier, celebrated on December 3. The date was chosen because the remains of an unknown soldier were buried by the Kremlin Wall in Moscow on December 3, 1966, creating one of the Soviet Union's most important new commemorative sites—and that date in turn had been selected because it was the 25th anniversary of the collapse of the German attack on Moscow. Both dates were marked in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine in 2022.

In the third category, we find new national holidays instituted in post-Soviet Russia. Two dates are especially important here. June 12 is the Day of the Adoption of the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the RSFSR, or Russia Day for short. Formally marked since 1992, it is a somewhat awkward holiday as it can serve as a reminder that Russia was one of the engines behind the dissolution of the USSR rather than being stripped of its empire by outside forces. National Unity Day on November 4 is a no less awkward holiday. First celebrated in 2005, under Putin, it was deliberately created on a date close to the divisive former October Revolution Day (November 7), renamed Day of Concord and Reconciliation under Yeltsin. Misdating the historical event, it celebrates the liberation of Moscow from Polish occupation in 1612 by a popular uprising and could thus technically also be called a day of war commemoration. Particularly in its early days, it was marked most prominently by Russian Marches organized across Russia by extreme Russian nationalists. Both holidays have been adopted by Russian-sponsored separatist entities such as the unrecognized Donets'k People's Republic, which started celebrating National Unity Day in 2019 and Russia Day in 2020. Another date referring back to the seventeenth century is January 18, the date of the Pereiaslav Rada in 1654, which Ukrainian historiography describes as a protection treaty between the Cossack hetmanate and Moscow, whereas Russia interprets it as having sealed Russian-Ukrainian "reunification." Celebrated with especial fanfare on the 300th anniversary in 1654, the date was routinely used in the Soviet period to tout Russian-Ukrainian unity; since 2015 it has been marked annually with events in Russian-occupied Crimea as the Day of Russian-Ukrainian Reunification or Unity, alongside March 18, the day of Crimea's own "reunification" with Russia in 2014.

The fourth category includes days that commemorate conflicts of the four most recent decades and their victims. Thus, the final withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan on February 15, 1989, is widely commemorated by veterans of the Soviet-Afghan war.[5] The Day of Solidarity in the Struggle Against Terrorism has been observed in Russia on September 3 since 2005, referencing the Beslan school massacre of 2004. The other days that fall into this category honor Ukrainians important to the Russian narrative about events in Ukraine since 2014, such as anti-Maidan activists who died in the 2014 Odesa clashes (May 2) and the victims of what appears to have been a Ukrainian air attack on the Luhans'k regional government building the same year (June 2).[6] Other events, for example, those commemorating members of a Russian film crew who died from mortar fire near Luhans'k on June 17, 2014, appear to have been limited to areas that had already been under Russian control before 2022.[7] The self-declared Donets'k and Luhans'k People's Republics have already gone through several changes in their commemorative calendars since their establishment in 2014. They reflect differences between the two entities as well as changing political configurations on the ground; for example, after the first leader of the LNR was deposed, the anniversary of the sham elections that had brought him to power was no longer celebrated.[8] Finally, Russians also commemorated the anniversary of the large-scale invasion itself, calling it a "special military operation."

Table of commemorative dates

Commemorative events organized in the territories newly occupied by Russia between February 24, 2022, and February 24, 2023

5 For an example from the newly occupied territories, see https://t.me/tavriya_kherson/3939, February 15, 2023, archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20230311160451/https://t.me/tavriya_kherson/3939.

6 For an example of a May 2 ceremony in the newly occupied territories, see https://t.me/kgbchanel/1211, May 2, 2022.

7 "Zhiteli Respubliki pochtili pamiat' rossiiskikh zhurnalistov, pogibshikh pod Metallistom," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, June 17, 2022, https://lug-info.com/ru/news/zhiteli-respubliki-pochtili-pamyat-rossijskih-zhurnalistov-pogibshih-pod-metallistom-2.

8 Yulia Abibok, "Unrecognized Holidays: Old and New 'State' Traditions in the Self-Proclaimed Republics in the East of Ukraine," in *Language of Conflict: Discourses of the Ukrainian Conflict*, ed. Natalia Knoblock (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 177–94.

RU – events at war memorials organized by the occupation authorities
UA – events at war memorials organized by Ukrainian local authorities

Frequency:
F – frequent (event took place in ten or more different localities)
O – occasional (up to ten different localities)
U – unique (only in the specific locality indicated)

Date	**Name of the state holiday or commemorative date** (**bold** – official Ukrainian dates *italics* – commemorative dates that do not currently have official status)	**RU**	**UA**
Starting March 13	**Days of Liberation (of specific localities) from the German Fascist Invaders**. *The first such event took place in Kherson*	F	O
May 1	Day of Spring and Labor **(International Labor Day)**	O	
May 2	**Day of Remembrance of those who died as a result of the tragic events that took place in Odesa on May 2, 2014** (official status in Odesa only)	F	
May 5	*Press Day (USSR).* Observed as an occasion to commemorate journalists and typographers who died fighting fascism (in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region)	U	
May 6	Feast Day of Saint George	O	
May 8	**Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation**		F
May 9	Day of the Victory of the Soviet People in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 **(Ukr.: Day of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War)**	F	O
May 18	*Field Marshall Aleksandr Suvorov remembrance day (220th anniversary of his death)*	U	
May 28	Border Guard Day	O	
May 31	*Anniversary of the Battle of the Kalka River* (commemorated on May 29 in Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region)	U	
June 2	*Day of Remembrance of those who died as a result of the Ukrainian aerial attack on the former building of the Luhans'k regional government*	O	
June 12	Russia Day	O	
June 22	Day of Remembrance and Mourning (commemorating Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union)	F	
June 29	Day of Partisans and Members of the Underground	O	
July 1	Day of Veterans of Armed Conflict	O	
July 31	Russian Navy Day (last Sunday of July)	O	
August 1	Day of Remembrance of Russian soldiers who fell in the First World War of 1914–1918 (Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region)	U	
August 2	Day of the Airborne Forces of the Russian Federation	O	
August 13	Gymnast Day (second Saturday of August) (Kherson)	U	
August 22	Russian Flag Day	O	
September 3	Day of Solidarity in the Struggle Against Terrorism (Kherson)	U	
October 28	**Day of the Liberation of Ukraine from the Fascist Invaders** (observed without any political symbols)	O	O

November 4	Russian National Unity Day (Shchaslyvtseve, Kherson region)	U	
November 26	St. George's Cross Day (Skadovs'k, Kherson region)	U	
December 3	Unknown Soldier Day	O	
December 6	*Day of Remembrance of St. Aleksandr Nevskii* (Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region)	U	
December 9	*Day of the Heroes of the Fatherland* (Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region)	U	
January 9	*Birthday of Magomed Nurbagandovich Nurbagandov, Hero of Russia*	O	
January 18	*Anniversary of the Pereiaslav Rada* (Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region)	U	
January 27	Day of the Complete Liberation of Leningrad from the Fascist Blockade	O	
February 2	Day of the Defeat of the German fascist army at Stalingrad by the Soviet army	O	
February 15	Day of Remembrance of Russians who served outside the borders of their fatherland **(Day of Tribute to Participants in Armed Conflicts on Foreign Territory)**	F	
February 23	Defender of the Fatherland Day	F	
February 24	Anniversary of the "Special Military Operation"	F	

Linking practices

Regardless of content, ceremonies on all these commemorative dates often took place at Great Patriotic War memorials, which are typically the largest and most central monuments in any given location and—especially in rural areas—often the only ones. Other war memorials, such as those to soldiers' lives lost in Afghanistan, could also serve as venues for commemorative ceremonies.

The repertoire of commemorative events drew heavily on the Soviet canon. Thus it included gunfire salutes,[9] sporting events for both Victory Day and minor holidays such as Navy Day,[10] swearing-in ceremonies for new recruits or volunteers,[11] and ceremonies to decorate Russian soldiers who distinguished themselves in battle (see figure 7.1). Another set of practices involved soldiers handing out gifts to residents on the occasion of commemorative dates.

9 See, for example, "Rabotniki prokuratury v Belovodske zazhgli Vechnyi ogon' u pamiatnika pavshim voinam," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 15, 2022, https://lug-info.com/news/rabotniki-prokuratury-v-belovodske-zazhgli-vechnyj-ogon-u-pamyatnika-pavshim-voinam, 3.40.

10 For examples, see Egortsev, *Den' Pobedy na Dnepre*; "V Khersone vpervye posle osvobozhdeniia goroda otmetili Den' VMF," *TASS*, July 31, 2022, https://tass.ru/obschestvo/15353321.

11 https://t.me/v_and_z/3063, November 4, 2022; https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/12401, November 4, 2022.

Figure 7.1. Award ceremony for Russian soldiers in front of the monument to the Heroes of the Civil War and Great Patriotic War in Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region, on Heroes of the Fatherland Day. Three types of orders were awarded: the Order of Valor (Orden Muzhestva, instituted in post-Soviet Russia), the Medal for Courage (Medal' "Za otvagu," a Russian medal derived from a Soviet one), and the Cross of St. George, derived from a Tsarist Russian order. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *Tavriia*, December 9, 2022, https://t.m/tavria_kherson/3142.

In holding these types of ceremonies in front of memorials to earlier wars, the invaders continued an age-old tradition. During and after the Second World War, ceremonies to decorate Red Army soldiers inside, but especially outside, Soviet territory often took place in front of Tsarist-era monuments to military leaders and soldiers, such as the Prussian-built memorial in the Lower Silesian town of Bunzlau (present-day Bolesławiec) in honor of the Russian field marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, who died there in 1813.[12] In 2022, the occupiers organized, for example, a decoration ceremony on Heroes of the Fatherland Day in Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region, in front of a monument that honors heroes of both the Russian Civil War and the Great Patriotic War.[13] It is noteworthy that the Ukrainian military appears not to have made such use of war memorials, in a deliberate departure from Soviet precedent and Russian practice. President Volodymyr Zelens'kyi typically awarded orders himself. On April 5, he

12 See photos at LërYch'-RUS, "Krasnaia Armiia 12 fevralia 1945 goda vstupila v Buntslau...," February 12, 2020, 12, https://cont.ws/@vmrus1/1583068.

13 https://t.me/NK_winter/22957, December 9, 2022; "V Khersonskoi oblasti rossiiskim voennosluzhashchim vruchili nagrady," *Lenta novostei Khersona*, December 12, 2022, https://kherson-news.ru/society/2022/12/09/75598.html.

permanently turned the White Hall of the presidential residence, the Mariïns'kyi Palace, into a place where Hero of Ukraine medals would be awarded and decreed that it should henceforth be known as the White Hall of the Heroes of Ukraine.[14] Zelens'kyi also conducted award ceremonies in the Palace gardens and, in December 2022, in embattled Bakhmut.[15] The contrast could not have been more striking. Russian award ceremonies were steeped in formality: they took place on special dates in front of monuments, stressed military and political hierarchies in clothing and body language, and often featured masked soldiers and talk of military secrets that cannot be divulged. Distinctions were often awarded by relatively low-ranking officers. In contrast, the Ukrainian side stressed equality and informality in the way it broadcast such ceremonies: the president typically appeared in his trademark green T-shirt, and other high-ranking officials likewise wore functional clothing when awarding medals.[16]

One of the main objectives of the Russian-sponsored ceremonies was to establish symbolic connections and continuity: between heroism and martyrdom in the Great Patriotic War and the struggle against today's supposed Ukrainian Nazis; between the hallowed ancestors of the wartime generation, today's adults, and their children; and between the newly "liberated" territories and Russia.

One straightforward way of doing so was through what one might call linking practices, already briefly discussed in chapter 4 with reference to eternal flames. Such practices go back to Soviet and earlier, especially religious, precedents. In the late Soviet period, new Great Patriotic War memorials would often be consecrated by burying "sacred" soil from the so-called Hero Cities or igniting eternal flames with torches lit at one of the existing flames in Moscow or Leningrad. Perhaps somewhat counter-

14 "U Mariïns'komu palatsi ziavilasia Bila zala Heroïv Ukraïni," *Ukrinform*, April 6, 2022, https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3449719-u-mariinskomu-palaci-zavilasa-bila-zala-geroiv-ukraini-zelenskij.html.

15 "Volodymyr Zelens'kyi vruchyv vysoki derzhavni nahorody liudiam, zavdiaky iakym Ukraïna zberihaie svoiu nezalezhnist'," Official website of the president of Ukraine, August 24, 2022, https://www.president.gov.ua/news/volodimir-zelenskij-vruchiv-visoki-derzhavni-nagorodi-lyudya-77281; "Ziavylosiia video, iak Zelens'kyi u Bakhmuti zustrivsiia z viis'kovymy ta vruchyv nahorody," *Sudovo-iuridychna hazeta*, December 20, 2022, https://www.sud.ua/uk/news/video/257202-poyavilos-video-kak-zelenskiy-v-bakhmute-vstretilsya-s-voennymi-i-vruchil-nagrady.

16 For an example featuring Minister of the Interior Denys Monastyrs'kyi, see Vitalii Bondariev, "Komandyra roty bataľionu 'Vinnytsia' nahorodyly ordenom 'Za muzhnist'' III stupeniia," *Suspil'ne: Novyny*, December 17, 2022, https://suspilne.media/340896-komandira-roti-bataljonu-vinnica-nagorodili-ordenom-za-muznist-iii-stupena.

intuitively, the collapse of the Soviet Union has boosted such practices and widened their geography by making self-organized cross-border travel easier. Engaging in secular pilgrimages of military commemoration, residents of post-Soviet countries have traveled along symbolic routes connected to the Great Patriotic War in cars, motorcycles, or other—sometimes historic—vehicles.[17] Some of these journeys take participants from their hometowns to Berlin, often trying to retrace the paths taken by Red Army units from their hometowns. In other cases, they connect well-known battle sites or Hero Cities across the former Soviet Union. Such pilgrimages can involve transporting handfuls of soil, replica wartime banners, lamps or torches lit from an eternal flame, or objects representing one's home region (such as coal from the Donbas). These objects are then left as offerings at war memorials in other cities, or consecrated and taken back, similar to Orthodox icons taken for consecration to revered monasteries. While such practices are by no means restricted to former Soviet countries and World War II commemoration, they do seem particularly popular in countries with an Orthodox Christian background, where pilgrimages and crucessions were widespread well into the second half of the twentieth century and had to be deliberately replaced by secularized socialist rituals.[18] One particularly impressive example is the Serbian chapel at the Zeytenlik military cemetery in Thessaloniki for the Allied dead of World War I. The chapel flows over with objects left there by visitors from Serbia.[19]

In 2022, linking practices were used in order to stitch the newly occupied territories to Russia similarly to how empires have always established symbolic connections between their heartlands and newly conquered territories, or between different colonies. On May 9, the siege of Mariupol', Donets'k region, was still going on, and the Russian attacks had already destroyed much of the city. Yet a number of high-ranking politicians from Russia and the occupied territories celebrated Victory Day at

17 Mischa Gabowitsch [Mikhail Gabovich], "Sviatoi ostrov Treptov: postmigrantskie i transgranichnye voenno-memorial'nye praktiki v sovremennom Berline," in *Pamiatnik i prazdnik: Etnografiia Dnia Pobedy*, ed. Mikhail Gabovich [Mischa Gabowitsch] (St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020), 383–410, especially 395–408.

18 See Ulrike Huhn, *Glaube und Eigensinn: Volksfrömmigkeit zwischen orthodoxer Kirche und sowjetischem Staat 1941 bis 1960* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014); Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty*, 165–93; Gabowitsch, "Victory Day before the Cult."

19 For parallels between the commemorative practices at Zeytenlik and post-Soviet secular pilgrimages of war commemoration, see Gabowitsch, "Sviatoi ostrov Treptov," 401–2.

a local memorial to civilian victims of the 1941–43 German occupation. For this purpose, they claimed to have brought a flame from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow in a car that had been used on the Ukrainian front in 1944. They also "took a 300 meter St. George's Ribbon from Orel to Mariupol'," boasting that "this canvas has been in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Blagoveshchensk, Ufa, and Tver'."[20] The same day, in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, another prominent Russian politician solemnly lit an eternal flame with fire brought from Moscow.[21] The day before, a Russian channel posted a video of masked Russian soldiers at night riding an armored vehicle. The vehicle displayed a red flag combining different Soviet and post-Soviet symbols, which the video described as a "Victory Banner," and one of the soldiers proclaimed they had brought it from Krasnodar region in Russia as a token of peace.[22]

This was in addition to the numerous rallies involving motorcycles or armored vehicles that had already been taking place within the regions occupied in 2014 with the express aim of Russifying them. In 2016, on the eve of Russia Day (June 12), a holiday with a comparatively low profile in Russia itself, the Donbas chapter of the Night Wolves motorbike club organized a rally with Russian flags in Luhans'k. The chapter's chairman "stated that the Luhans'k region is only getting to know the Russian holidays, so the motorcycle rally was a kind of announcement of an important Russian date to local residents" and declared that his club considered Russia their "homeland and the land that the Luhans'k People's Republic strives toward."[23] In 2022, a rally with both regular cars and

20 "Denis Pushilin zazheg Vechnyi ogon' v Mariupole," Denis Pushilin's official website, May 9, 2022, https://denis-pushilin.ru/news/denis-pushilin-zazheg-vechnyj-ogon-v-mariupole/.

21 "Torzhestvennoe zazhzhenie."

22 https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1826, May 8, 2022.

23 "'Nochnye volki' proveli v Luganske motoprobeg s trikolorami, posviashchennyi Dniu Rossii," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, accessed May 9, 2023, https://lug-info.com/news/nochnye-volki-proveli-v-luganske-motoprobeg-s-trikolorami-posvyaschennyi-dnyu-rossii-14285. On the role of the Night Wolves in Putin-era memory politics as well as the associated moral panics in the West, see: Philipp Bürger, *Geschichte im Dienst für das Vaterland: Traditionen und Ziele der russländischen Geschichtspolitik seit 2000* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 95–110; Mischa Gabowitsch, "Insel Treptow: Praktische Aneignung und mediale Kartographien sowjetischer Gedenkorte in Berlin und Wittenberg," in *Kriegsgedenken als Event: Der 9. Mai 2015 im postsozialistischen Europa*, ed. Mischa Gabowitsch, Cordula Gdaniec, and Ekaterina Makhotina (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017), 260–70; Virág Molnár, Karolina Koziura, and Franziska König-Paratore, "Russia's Night Wolves, Migrating Memory and Europe's Eastern Frontier," *European Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 1 (April 2021): 71–103.

armored vehicles displaying a range of symbols connected to the occupation linked several places in the Kherson region on the occasion of Victory Day.[24]

In addition to connecting Russia with its new ("recovered" or "liberated") territories and the Second World War with Russia's new struggle against supposed Nazis, Russian-organized ceremonies also featured multiple practices intended to link generations. At the Victory Day ceremony in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, Russian politician Andrei Turchak said it was "our task to preserve this memory and carry it through the ages" so the "genetic code of the victorious people is preserved."[25] In time-honored tradition, one way to do this was to invite some of the handful of surviving veterans of the Second World War to celebrations, as happened, for example, in Novopskov, Luhans'k region.[26]

At events commemorating the Great Patriotic War, the Russian administrations struggled to come up with truly distinctive rituals. After all, practices of war commemoration were not fundamentally different in Ukraine, especially the eastern and southern parts of the country that Russia occupied. The same veterans were honored by both sides both before and after February 24; thus, the same 98-year-old former soldier who was invited to the Russian-sponsored Victory Day ceremony in Novopskov had been feted in the same way before the invasion, and had only recently been awarded a life-long pension by a Ukrainian presidential decree.[27]

Another practice embodying the connection between generations was the Immortal Regiment. This involves participants walking in a procession with portraits of relatives—usually grandparents—who contributed to the Soviet effort in the Great Patriotic War. Started in 2012 as a local campaign in Tomsk to subvert Russia's overly state-centric commemorative traditions, the Immortal Regiment spread like wildfire across the Russian-speaking world and soon had several million participants every year on Victory Day.[28] This included numerous instances in Ukraine,

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24 https://t.me/rentv_news/46990, May 9, 2022.

25 "Glava LNR i sekretar' gensoveta." 1:15

26 "Rabotniki prokuratury v Novopskove zazhgli Vechnyi ogon' u memoriala pavshim voinam."

27 "Prezydent Ukraïny pryznachyv dovichni vyplaty pevnym katehoriiam osib," *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, June 25, 2020, https://zn.ua/UKRAINE/prezident-ukrainy-naznachil-pozhiznennye-vyplaty-opredelennym-katehorijam-lits.html.

28 Gabowitsch, "Are Copycats Subversive?"; Ivan Kurilla, "Understanding the Immortal Regiment: Memory Dualism in a Social Movement," *Europe-Asia Studies* 75, no. 8 (2023): 1266–85.

Figure 7.2. A sermon before a march of the Immortal Regiment in Tokmak, Zaporizhzhia region. Instead of portraits of their relatives, participants in the march are holding photos of Heroes of the USSR from the region. The placards were later laid at the foot of a war memorial. Screenshot from a video posted to the *Vezhlivye i zabotlivye* Telegram channel, May 9, 2022, https://t.me/v_and_z/605.

though many Ukrainian observers soon came to view the campaign as sponsored by the Russian government.[29] Indeed, the Russian state quickly attempted to co-opt the initiative and turn Immortal Regiment marches into state-sponsored events, introducing numerous Soviet and pro-regime symbols that had been banned by the movement's initial statutes and forcing schoolchildren and others to march with portraits of official heroes rather than relatives—changes that also influenced Immortal Regiments outside Russia's borders. While a sizeable proportion of participants continued to insist that the marches were non-political, in Ukraine in particular they became associated with pro-Russian sympathies in public representation, as evidenced in the arrest of Olena Berezhna, a pro-Russian activist and leader of a Kyiv chapter of the Regiment, on May 9, 2019, for wearing the banned St. George's Ribbon (see below on this symbol).[30] While small Immortal Regiment processions continued to take place in Ukraine before 2022, following the large-scale invasion, the campaign

29 Azat Bilalutdinov, "Die Gedenkinitiative 'Unsterbliches Regiment' zwischen Gesellschaft und Politik," in *Kriegsgedenken als Event: Der 9. Mai 2015 im postsozialistischen Europa*, ed. Mischa Gabowitsch, Cordula Gdaniec, and Ekaterina Makhotina (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2017), 129–36.

30 "Pered pochatkom aktsiï 'Bezsmertnyi polk' zatrymaly Olenu Berezhnu," *RBK-Ukraïna*, May 9, 2019, https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/news/pered-nachalom-aktsii-bessmertnyy-polk-zaderzhali-1557384925.html.

definitively became associated with Russia, with marches being organized only in the occupied territories.[31] Thus, despite its initial potential to become a transnational update of the Soviet commemorative canon, the Immortal Regiment turned into a way to celebrate the link between generations in distinctly Russian fashion.

Educational practices

In keeping with the idea of intergenerational transmission, children were important participants in commemorative ceremonies, embodying a new generation in need of patriotic education about, and identification with, the exploits of heroic forebears. Photos of groups of children on organized visits of war memorials soon became a common sight in Russian propaganda channels on Telegram.[32]

War memorials in the occupied territories were first turned into sites of military-patriotic training for children, teenagers, and young adults on the eve of Victory Day 2022. One example is a field trip for approximately thirty children from Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region, aged between two and fourteen. The trip was organized by local policemen and Cossacks.[33] "Together with their parents," the children "visited sites of military glory in Enerhodar region." They were made to stand at attention, wear balaclavas or present-day Russian army uniforms, and try out World War II-era weapons (see figure 7.3).[34] Policemen and searchers told the children about "bloody battles on the territory of Zaporizhzhia region," individually "commemorated local heroes and their feats," and spoke about the return of historical memory and a patriotic youth movement. Such events often featured militarization and re-enactment. For Victory Day in particular, children were often dressed up in military uniforms—a practice that can be found from the United States to Turkey and is not unheard of in

31 "V 2022 godu 'Bessmertnyi polk' proshel ne vo vsekh regionakh," *Bessmertnyi polk Ukrainy* (blog), May 9, 2022, https://polkua.com/v-2022-godu-bessmertnyj-polk-proshyol-ne-vo-vsex-regionax/.

32 For an example from Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, see https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7510, May 22, 2022.

33 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6665, May 4, 2022.

34 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6665, May 4, 2022.

Figure 7.3. Field trip for children from Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia region, and their parents to the village of Velyka Bilozerka. The trip included a visit to a memorial on a common grave, a meeting with volunteer searchers, an introduction to firearms, and lunch. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *luzhnyi platsdarm* on May 4, 2022, https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6665.

Ukraine[35] but has become especially common in Russia in recent years (see chapter 5 for examples).

However, until late 2022, the participation of minors in events at war memorials remained unsystematic. They usually featured as members of crowds rather than being presented as agents in their own right. At the end of 2022, Russia and its proxy administrators actively started creating a range of children's and youth organizations with a focus on military-patriotic education, including war commemoration, spiritual and moral guidance, paramilitary sport and tactical war games, shooting practice, marching drills, and first aid. Some of these organizations, for example, the Young Builders of Kherson, were based on local initiative, while others were branches of government-sponsored nationwide Russian movements, such as the *Yunarmiia* (Young Army), a military-patriotic organization for children and teens founded in 2016 at defense minister Sergei Shoigu's initiative, the Young Guard of United Russia (2005), and the *Dvizhenie Pervykh* (Movement of the First), created in 2022.

35 For examples, see "Den' Osvobozhdeniia: veteranam ne khvatilo mesta na 'frontovom privale,' a Kostusev otdal chest' pri 'pustoi' golove," *Dums'ka*, April 10, 2013, https://dumskaya.net/news/na-privale-veteranam-ne-hvatilo-mesta-a-kostusev-025783/; "Deti v voennoi forme," Unian Fotobank, May 9, 2018, https://photo.unian.net/photo/833734-children-in-uniform.

The leaders of these movements increasingly started using war memorials as sites of education. One such use was for initiation rites such as oath-taking. On February 23—Defender of the Fatherland Day—2023, children from Heniches'k and Novotroïts'ke, Kherson region, were taken to a memorial to the fallen of the Great Patriotic War and made to "take an oath and swear allegiance to the Fatherland, promising to remember the Heroes, honor their memory, and be patriots of their Motherland."[36] Children in occupied Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, also swore an oath on that day at the local Communal Grave memorial, where they additionally unfolded a "large St. George's Ribbon."[37] Pupils of a school in Milove, Luhans'k region, were inducted into the *Yunarmiia* during a field trip to the Young Guard museum in Sorokyne (formerly Krasnodon), where they stood for photos in front of the famous eponymous monument.[38]

Apart from initiation rites, regular events at war memorials in the occupied territories included clean-up campaigns, flower-laying ceremonies on commemorative dates, honor guards, and recording addresses to Russian soldiers. For example, in Volnovakha, Donets'k region, members of an organization called Young Guard—Youth Army of the Donets'k People's Republic—laid flowers at a war memorial on the Day of the Unknown Soldier.[39] In Berdians'k, Zaporizhzhia region, members of a group called Young South (*Iug molodoi*) laid flowers at a memorial to soldiers who died in Afghanistan.[40] In Heniches'k, Kherson region, members of a youth group called *I am Kherson* recorded an address to soldiers of the "Special Military Operation" on Defender of the Fatherland Day against the background of a Second World War memorial.[41] In Skadovs'k, Kherson region, the regional Ministry of Youth Politics and Sports marked Defender of the Fatherland Day and the first anniversary of the start of the "Special Military Operation" by having school pupils as well as members

36 https://t.me/YunarmiaHerson/74, February 24, 2023.

37 "Popolnenie v riadakh iunarmeitsev novykh territorii," Iunarmiia: Vserossiiskoe detsko-iunosheskoe dvizhenie, July 28, 2023, https://yunarmy.ru/press-center/news/popolnenie-v-ryadakh-yunarmeytsev-novykh-territoriy.

38 "Tretii na osvobozhdennykh territoriiakh LNR otriad Iunarmii poiavilsia v Melovom," *Luganskii informatsionnyi tsentr*, April 1, 2023, https://lug-info.com/news/tretij-na-osvobozhdennyh-territoriyah-lnr-otryad-yunarmii-poyavilsya-v-melovom.

39 Volnovakhskii shtab "Molodaia Gvardiia-Iunarmiia," "3 dekabria v Rossii pamiatnaia data, odna iz samykh vazhnykh dlia vsekh, kto chtit podvigi nashikh soldat," *VK*, December 3, 2022, https://vk.com/ynarmiavl?w=wall-215631160_35.

40 https://t.me/YugMolodojbrd/939, February 15, 2023.

41 https://t.me/iamKherson1/170, February 23, 2023.

of *Yunarmiia* and *I am Kherson* clean up a war memorial, commenting that "some time ago we were prevented from doing this." The head of the ministry's department of patriotic education said at the event that it "symbolized patriotic education" and "the memory of generations."[42]

By the beginning of 2023, school pupils and teachers, as well as members and leaders of *Yunarmiia* and other children's and youth GONGOs, attended ceremonies at war memorials more frequently than national or regional political leaders, whose interest in such memorials faded by late 2022.

Symbols

Given the significant overlap between the Russian and Ukrainian commemorative calendar and associated practices, the main way of Russifying commemorative ceremonies at war memorials was through the use of symbols that originated in Russia both before and during the invasion. In particular, these included flags, banners, and ribbons, as well as the V and Z symbols that came to stand for Russia's military intervention in Ukraine.

The main flags used were the World War II-era Victory Banner, the flags of Russia and unrecognized entities such as the Donets'k and Luhans'sk People's Republics, and a red flag with the face of Jesus Christ the Savior based on the gonfalon of medieval Rus'. More rarely, one could also see specialized flags, such as that of the Russian Airborne Forces or the republics of the Russian North Caucasus, such as Dagestan, Chechnya, or North Ossetia.[43] This was supplemented by ribbons in the colors of St. George and the Russian tricolor, as well as the letters V and Z.

The St. George's Ribbon was already associated with both war memory and Russian imperialism before the 2022 attack. It is based on the Order of St. George, a military distinction introduced in Tsarist Russia. During the Great Patriotic War, Stalin reinstated a number of distinctions that used the same black-and-yellow or black-and-orange colors, and under late socialism, these colors were occasionally used in war commemoration. The history of the ribbon as a popular commemorative symbol starts in 2005, when a journalist working for a Russian state news agency proposed

42 https://t.me/iamKherson1/168, February 22, 2023.
43 Mykola Homanyuk's field observations.

that anyone wishing to show respect for veterans of the Second World War could wear a small black-and-orange polyester ribbon on their clothes. Unlike the poppy, the ribbon never caught on as a fundraising tool, but it soon became wildly popular as a generic commemorative symbol. People started wearing it on their clothes at commemorative events and sometimes even in daily life. Especially around dates such as Victory Day, it was used to advertise things from vodka to strip clubs by associating them with patriotism and war memory. While the ribbon was not supposed to be sold, many small businesses started producing it commercially.

The ribbon spread quickly beyond Russia to the post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine, and Russian speakers further afield. Everywhere it became a hybrid symbol. First of all, it stood for the memory of the Great Patriotic War, or rather, for the memory of its memory, as most of those wearing it were grandchildren of war participants and cherished the memory of being taken to war memorials by their grandparents. But in many countries outside Russia, the ribbon also symbolized allegiance to Soviet and Russian narratives about the war against alternative memory frameworks. Those who wore it felt they were faced with a repudiation or dismissal of everything Soviet, including Soviet victory in the Second World War. Against this contempt, they wanted to stress their grandparents' achievements. The greater the victory, the prouder one could be of one's own ancestors' contribution to it. And thus, many wearers of the St. George's Ribbon came to buy more or less wholeheartedly into visions of Soviet and Russian greatness and other countries' ungratefulness. This does not mean that anyone donning the ribbon was automatically a Putinist, and in Ukraine in particular, many took up the St. George's Ribbon out of traditional pride in the Soviet triumph in World War II rather than an allegiance to present-day Russia. Yet over time the Russian regime increasingly turned the ribbon into a symbol of generic Russian patriotism and support for the country's present-day policies. In Ukraine, pro-Russian organizations were especially active in popularizing its use.[44] By 2014, it was widely—though not unanimously—seen as a symbol of Russian claims on Ukrainian territory.[45]

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44 Liebich, Myshlovska, and Sereda, "The Ukrainian Past and Present," 94.

45 On the St. George's Ribbon and its uses, see Pål Kolstø, "Symbol of the War—But Which One? The St. George Ribbon in Russian Nation-Building," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 94, no. 4 (2016): 660–701; Gabowitsch, Gdaniec, and Makhotina, *Kriegsgedenken als Event*.

In 2022, participants in most Russian-sponsored commemorative ceremonies and pro-war events, both in the occupied territories and in Russia, wore St. George's ribbons as a matter of course. On high holidays, such as Victory Day, someone was typically on duty to distribute them to all those present. In addition, the colors of the ribbon were used in designing other symbols of both the invasion and Great Patriotic War memory. Russian tanks, pro-invasion posters, or TV programs—everything included symbols in black-and-orange. In many ways, Putin's forces came to use the ribbon the way the Bolsheviks used the color red: as a basic emblem of their imperial project. By associating that project firmly with the memory of the Second World War, they constantly reiterated one of the basic tenets of Russian propaganda—that the Russian campaign was a way to rectify perceived slights to that memory.

One set of symbols often painted or printed in the colors of the ribbon were the letters V and Z. These appeared spontaneously at the beginning of the invasion, apparently out of nowhere, and were used primarily as insignia on uniforms and vehicles and also sprayed as graffiti on Ukrainian monuments or on buildings to mark them as searched. However, the flags visible in many Russian propaganda videos and photos were clearly produced according to a standard design in preparation for the invasion.

During the first months of the invasion, the flag most frequently displayed not only on monuments and at commemorative ceremonies but also on Russian vehicles was not the Russian flag but the Victory Banner. A red flag with a hammer-and-sickle symbol, a five-pointed star, and the abbreviated designation of one of the Red Army divisions that took part in capturing Berlin, it was one of the banners specially produced for being hoisted on the Reichstag building, and the only one that survived and was taken to the Central Museum of the Armed Forces. Taken out of the museum only twice on special commemorative occasions in the Soviet period, it was later replaced with replicas. In post-Soviet times, the banner and its copies have become centerpieces of a special cult. Russia has a special law regulating its use, and Russian diplomacy toward some of its post-Soviet neighbors and several unrecognized pro-Russian entities across the former Soviet space has involved presenting official copies of the banner. Most importantly, perhaps, versions of the banner—from small car flags to giant copies—have been used in commemorative ceremonies both in Russia and abroad. Associated with the Soviet triumph in World War II and, increasingly, with post-Soviet Russia's politics of history, the banner

has been especially popular with imperialist, revanchist, and nationalist participants in commemorative events. It has often been paired with slogans such as "To Berlin" and "We can repeat it," a threat against Russia's imagined enemies. The banner's status as a commemorative symbol is also officially regulated in Belarus as well as Transnistria, the unrecognized entity that occupies the eastern bank of the Dniester river in Moldova.[46]

In Ukraine, a passage regulating uses of the Victory Banner was added to the Law on the Perpetuation of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 in April 2011, under President Ianukovych.[47] However, that addition was struck down by Ukraine's Supreme Court in June after Iurii Kostenko, the leader of the Ukrainian People's Party, filed a complaint about it. The court found that the banner went beyond the exhaustive list of state symbols defined by Ukraine's constitution.[48] On May 9, 2015, the entire law became obsolete when it was replaced with a Law on the Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War of 1941–1945.[49] The banner's public use was henceforth discouraged, resulting in an effective ban in some parts of Ukraine. This was in response to its use by pro-Russian demonstrators and supporters of the ousted president Viktor Ianukovych. In 2011, there had been an instance in L'viv where the banner was publicly defiled by being driven over and burnt.[50] These actions were widely reported in Russia. Accordingly, in Russia's war on Ukraine, the banner, more than any other symbol, came to stand for the commemorative culture that Russia set out to protect from what it described as Ukrainian nationalism.

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46 Anne M. Platoff, "Of Tablecloths and Soviet Relics: A Study of the Banner of Victory (Znamia Pobedy)," *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology* 20 (2013): 73–74.

47 "Pro vnesennia zmin do Zakonu Ukraïny 'Pro uvichnennia Peremohy u Velykii Vitchyznianii viini 1941–1945 rokiv' shchodo poriadku ofitsiinoho vykorystannia kopii Prapora Peremohy," Official website of the Ukrainian parliament, April 21, 2011, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/3298-17.

48 "Rishennia Konstytutiinoho Sudu Ukraïny u spravi za konstytutsiinym zvernenniam hromadianyna Kostenka Iuriia Ivanovycha shchodo ofitsiinoho tlumachennia okremykh polozhen' pidpunktiv 1, 2 punktu 1 Zakonu Ukraïny 'Pro vnesennia zmin do Zakonu Ukraïny "Pro uvichnennia Peremohy u Velykii Vitchyznianii viini 1941–1945 rokiv" shchodo poriadku ofitsiinoho vykorystannia kopii Prapora Peremohy,'" Official website of the Ukrainian parliament, June 6, 2011, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/v006p710-11.

49 "Zakon Ukraïny pro uvichnennia peremohy nad natsyzmom u Druhii svitovii viini 1939–1945 rokiv," Official website of the Ukrainian parliament, April 9, 2015, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/315-19.

50 Jeremy Hicks, "A Holy Relic of War: The Soviet Victory Banner as Artefact," in *Remembering the Second World War*, ed. Patrick Finney (Routledge, 2017), 211.

Figure 7.4. Monument to "Internationalist warriors," Kherson. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, May 9, 2022.

In the invasion, accordingly, the Victory Banner was typically more prominent than other symbols, such as the Russian flag. Copies of the Victory Banner were displayed, alongside other symbols, as an ensign on a wide range of Russian vehicles as they advanced into Ukraine, illustrating the Russian narrative of a struggle against Ukrainian "Nazis" and a repeat of the Great Patriotic War. Russian soldiers installed it at Great Patriotic War memorials.[51] The outwardly Soviet, but essentially post-Soviet, Russian practice of adorning memorials with the banner became hybridized with local folk practices, as exemplified by the Bilozerka, Kherson region, armored vehicle monument where multi-colored farewell ribbons tied to the turret (see chapter 2) coexisted with the Victory Banner. This was documented in a post in a Russian Telegram channel that—ironically—declared that Russian soldiers had "restored the historical look of the legendary Soviet self-propelled vehicle."[52] The Victory Banner was even added to memorials for veterans of the Soviet-Afghan

51 "Rosgvardeitsy i zhiteli Ukrainy priveli v poriadok pamiatniki geroiam VOV," *REN TV*, April 27, 2022, https://ren.tv/news/v-mire/968480-rosgvardeitsy-i-zhiteli-ukrainy-priveli-v-poriadok-pamiatniki-geroiam-vov.

52 https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7084, May 12, 2022.

war (see figure 7.1).[53] As with the eternal flame discussed in chapter 4, a project to "protect" a symbol led to an inflationary use of that symbol in public space.

In Kherson in particular, the use of the Victory Banner as a symbol of the occupation gave rise to out-and-out flag wars. A Victory Banner hoisted on a flagpole in Kherson's Park of Glory was cut down multiple times in the spring of 2022. A pro-Russian activist from Crimea recorded a video of himself putting the banner back up and vowing to plaster Kherson and the entire region with the banner.[54] After the initial attacks, the Russians installed a heavily armed guard with an armored troop carrier and an armored truck at the site. While this was gradually reduced over the summer, the decision to divert large numbers of soldiers and military equipment from combat to policing symbolic spaces points to the importance the occupiers attached to altering Ukraine's symbolic landscape.[55]

At the height of the Russian offensive, Crimean Duma deputy Mikhail Sheremet even floated the idea of making the Victory Banner Russia's new official state flag in response to the "war" supposedly unleashed on it by Western countries.[56] With time, however, and as Russian plans to incorporate the occupied territories into Russia took shape, the Victory Banner was increasingly eclipsed by the Russian tricolor in Russian-occupied Ukraine.

The flags of Donets'k and Luhans'k were used mainly in parts of those regions occupied by Russia in 2022 to signify that these territories belong to the self-proclaimed and Russian-supported entities. Similar flags were designed for other projected "People's Republics" in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia (and even Ukrainian regions that Russian soldiers never set foot in, such as Odesa or Dnipro, as well as Transnistria), but those were hardly ever displayed in public spaces, not least because Russian declarations about creating People's Republics in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia were inconclusive and quickly superseded by proclamations about these regions' incorporation into Russia.

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53 Mykola Homanyuk's fieldwork and photo from Kherson.

54 https://t.me/newsfrontnotes/25560, June 27, 2023.

55 Beth Redbird and Mykola Homanyuk, "What Ukraine Teaches Us about Colonization," *Footnotes: A Magazine of the American Sociological Association* 51, no. 1 (2023), https://www.asanet.org/footnotes-article/what-ukraine-teaches-us-about-colonization.

56 "Deputat Gosdumy predlozhil novyi gosudarstvennyi flag Rossii," *RIA Novosti*, May 18, 2022, https://ria.ru/20220518/flag-1789151676.html.

The other flag often used in Russian ceremonies was a red flag with the image of Christ the All-Merciful Savior, inspired by the Byzantine gonfalon and more specifically the "great banner" used as an army ensign by medieval and early modern Rus' princes up to the period of Ivan IV. Popular among Russian nationalist organizations since the 1990s, it was used in particular by separatist "people's militias" starting in 2014 with the added inscription "For Faith, the Tsar, and Holy Triune Rus'," a reference to the idea that Ukraine and Belarus are integral parts of Russia.[57]

The combination of the Soviet-era Victory Banner, the Russian and separatist flags, and the image of Christ might strike outside observers as bizarre. Yet it makes perfect sense from the point of view of Russia's politics of history. Displayed together, these flags signify that Russia's invasion is a repeat performance of the liberation of Ukraine from Nazi occupation in 1943–44 and part of the struggle against fascism, that Ukraine (like Belarus and other parts of the former Russian and Soviet empires) rightfully belongs to Russia, and that the invaders are engaged in a holy war against the West.

57 On flags and other elements of Russia's symbolic politics in occupied Ukraine, see Homanyuk, "Reich, Union, Rossija." On the Jesus flag, see Gabowitsch, "Emblems of Authority."

Chapter 8
Conclusions

Left alone, monuments unveiled as shiny individual works gradually merge into the monumentscape. Developing a patina or gathering dust or moss, they become part of the backdrop to our everyday activities, receding into the invisibility that Robert Musil claimed defines them. Constituting a natural kind of heritage protection, this shields them from outside intervention: a monument that remains invisible does not bother anyone.

Both the Russian invaders and Ukrainian iconoclasts fought this invisibility. The latter did so by redirecting attention to symbolic elements of war memorials that people had long ceased to be aware of, and reframing them as offensive. The former literally and metaphorically sandpapered and repainted memorials, stripping them of the historical patina that had inscribed them into the local landscape.

This landscape is what the occupiers misunderstood. Their approach to monuments in Ukraine, premised on the idea that Soviet war memorials were being systematically destroyed by a hostile regime, betrayed a misconception about how memory politics works in the neighboring country—a misconception that was driven by recent developments in Russia.

The reality of war memorials on the ground in Russia is more diverse than official narratives would have it. In recent years, however, there has been an attempt to orchestrate the kind of centralized policy of war memorial construction that never existed in the Soviet Union, under the aegis of organizations such as the Russian Military Historical Society. In general, memory politics under Putin has become more and more hierarchically structured; whereas alternative memory narratives and mnemonic practices were long allowed to exist in relatively marginalized corners of society, by the 2020s they were gradually shut down. The venerable *Memorial*

Society, dedicated to keeping up the memory of the Stalinist crimes and their victims, was disbanded by court order just before the beginning of the full-scale invasion, and the period since then has seen the removal of many existing monuments to those victims. The memory of Stalinist terror has been relegated to a niche dominated by the Russian Orthodox Church, and criticism of official views of the Great Patriotic War has been increasingly sanctioned or neutralized.

The Russian assumption appears to have been that Ukrainian memory politics was structured in a similarly top-down manner. Witnessing iconoclastic events in Lviv or Kyiv or attacks on specific types of monuments, such as Lenin statues, Russian observers simply assumed that Soviet-era monuments, including war memorials, were being destroyed in Ukraine in centralized fashion. This betrayed an ignorance of the complexity of Ukraine's actual memorialscape and a lack of familiarity with other big cities, let alone smaller towns and rural areas in Ukraine, and with the crucial role that local actors, including municipal administrations, played in Ukrainian memory politics.

Goalposts of a shifting frontier

Overall, Russia's policies toward war memorials in occupied Ukraine revealed a curious dynamic between ignorance and familiarity.

War memorials loomed large in Russian justifications for invasion. Once the invasion was underway, they featured prominently in war propaganda and served as settings for commemorative ceremonies aiming to legitimate imperial reconquest with reference to past heroism. This propaganda was aimed primarily at a domestic audience and, at least in theory, at residents of the newly occupied territories. Its success was limited, as were Russia's larger efforts to monopolize the memory of the Great Patriotic War for its own expansionist purposes.[1] Russia's management of war memorials on the ground also ran into problems. Having believed their own propaganda about decaying or destroyed war memorials in Ukraine, Russian officers and administrators were surprised when they discovered intact, well-maintained memorials. While presenting con-

1 Mischa Gabowitsch, "Von 'Faschisten' und 'Nazis': Russlands Geschichtspolitik und der Angriff auf die Ukraine," *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 5, no. 22 (2022): 55–62.

quest as liberation and homecoming, they often revealed their ignorance of local context by getting basic facts about memorials, their location, and their significance wrong.

Yet despite this marked ignorance of local context, war memorials also provided the Russian invaders with a sense of orientation in an otherwise unfamiliar space.[2] In the history of Russian military campaigns and the nationalist imagination, soldiers had often been given a—realistic or utopian—destination: Constantinople in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Berlin in the Second World War, or the Indian Ocean in the fantasies of Russian imperialist revanchists in the 1990s. In the attack on Ukraine, the aims of the campaign were always unclear and ever-changing, at least after the initial push on Kyiv failed. In this situation, monuments of a vaguely familiar type became orientation points. Great Patriotic War memorials in particular gave Russians a sense of advancing in the footsteps of their great forbears. For the Russian army, war memorials were like goalposts of a shifting frontier, guardians of phantom borders. In the form of stolen monuments, some of these forcibly enlisted border guards were made to leave their posts upon Russia's retreat.

In addition to spatial orientation, war memorials also provided the occupiers with orientation in time. They allowed them to fall back on a familiar chronology of history, with 1941–45 as the main historical beacon. They also served as ready-made venues for commemorative ceremonies—chapels for a cult of military glory past and present. Just as the Russian campaign had no clear destination in space, so it lacked an obvious end point in linear time once the fantasy of a swift campaign of conquest dissipated. Falling back on the cyclical time of the commemorative calendar was an obvious solution. The role of war memorials as anchors of familiarity for the Russian invaders also goes some way toward explaining the modifications they engaged in. Despite restorationist claims, the point was not to return them to an original state violated by Ukrainian disrespect. Rather, it was to bring them closer to the particular form of hybrid commemorative culture that has developed in Russia in recent years and therefore feels familiar to Russian soldiers and officials. That culture is similar to Ukraine's in its syncretism but, unlike its Ukrainian

2 Discussing "monuments in the landscape" in the Israeli context, James E. Young makes a similar point: "Together, these markers in the wilderness comprise a cartographical matrix by which Israelis navigate their new lives in the land." Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 225.

counterpart, relies heavily on Soviet symbols and on markers of Russia as heir to both the Soviet and pre-Soviet empires. Since war memorials in Russia and Ukraine built in the Soviet period exhibited many similarities before people in the two countries began hybridizing them each in their own way, they were obvious targets for such acts of familiarization. Thus—to use terms we introduced in chapter 1—the occupiers chose monuments as a way to Russify Ukraine's monumentscape because the additional investments in form required to do so were less onerous than those involved in building new monuments from scratch.

There was another reason why war memorials lent themselves to Russian propaganda. The Russian occupiers were in desperate need of ways to perform continuity and legitimacy. Human collaborationists were best suited for these purposes, but those turned out to be far less numerous and especially less high-profile than the Russians had expected. Living people are difficult to use in propaganda because they have their own opinions and can be difficult to control. Monuments, however, are silent—although, "[l]ike any political image, they make demands on their viewers."[3]

Decentering perspectives on war memorials

But what are those demands? For some Ukrainian activists, the answer was clear: Soviet war memorials were means of propaganda. They had to go, lest their presence be constantly used by Russia in support of its territorial claims on Ukraine. In addition, they conveyed a dangerously Soviet narrative about the Second World War, one that skipped over the Soviet oppression of Ukrainians.

Throughout this book, we have seen that war memorials in Ukraine, including those built in Soviet times, have in fact had a much larger array of meanings for those who have interacted with them. Might the solution, then, lie in applying an agonistic memory framework, one that allows for multiple approaches to one and the same war memorial (see chapter 1)? While the intentions behind this particular conception of pluralism are laudable, we would like to suggest here that the framework of agonism is insufficient. The agonistic model presupposes a battle of ideas or narra-

3 Tugendhaft, *The Idols of ISIS*, 70, writing about antiquities.

tives—in the particular case of Ukrainian war memorials, a competition between different accounts of the Second World War and the other military conflicts that Ukraine has been engaged in. Creating a framework for a pluralism of historical narratives is indeed a worthy aim, and one that Ukraine's official politics of history tried to put into place since 2015, for example by declaring both May 8 and 9 to be state holidays. Yet if nothing else, the Russian onslaught showed that not everyone is willing to play by the rules of the agonistic game, treating the other side as adversaries to be respected rather than enemies to be annihilated. Situating pluralisms solely at the level of narratives can be a risky project.

Does this mean that we need to throw the intuitions behind agonism overboard? Does it mean that all monuments that invaders can use to justify an attack should be removed? We have already mentioned one counterargument: removing monuments can give imperialist irredentists as much of a pretext for invasion as preserving them, if not more.

Yet beyond this observation, we need an account of the multi-faceted nature of war memorials that goes beyond a plurality of narratives and can give monuments some resilience in the face of easy calls for wholesale removal. In order to find such an account, we would like to take up a suggestion recently made by the writer and artist Yevgenia Belorusets in a discussion about Ukrainian monuments.[4] Since the beginning of the war in 2014, Belorusets has been tirelessly speaking up in defense of people from the Donbas who want to stay in their homes at any cost and, in response, are often indiscriminately demonized as collaborators. Many of these people feel connected to their region's industrial heritage from Soviet times, including their monument-strewn cityscapes. They see this heritage, and these monuments, as expressions of their own life-time achievements rather than mere symbols of Soviet injustice. To do justice to the ambiguity of monuments in such places—signs of oppression for some, elements of a familiar environment for others—Belorusets has proposed using the term "decentering." Developed by the cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget, this concept denotes the capability, typically evolved in late childhood, to consider several dimensions of an object or several aspects of a situation at the same time.

4 Contribution to the panel discussion "Decoloniality in Ukraine: Is there still a place for a 'Soviet soldier' in historic [sic] memory?" Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, December 1, 2022, https://www.skd.museum/programm/decoloniality-in-ukraine.

Drawing on this suggestion, we would like to propose that any monument can be experienced in at least five different modes. The political or symbolic mode that so much of the discussion turns on is but one of these modes, and thus—agonistic or mutually destructive—contests regarding the "true" symbolic meaning of a monument only touch upon one part of our experience of it. Other modes include the *artistic*, the *historical*, the *material*, and the *habitual*.

Artistic considerations have to do with a monument's artistic originality that might transcend its outward message. While, as we have seen, Soviet and post-Soviet war memorials are not usually prized by artists or art historians for their aesthetic qualities, considerations of artistic merit do come into play with some of them, such as Ivan Kavaleridze's cubo-futurist statue of the Bolshevik Artem that we mentioned in chapter 2. A monument's *historical* aspects—what Alois Riegl called its "antiquity value"—can also transcend its ostensible symbolism: any monument can act as a document of the historical era and situation in which it was built, even if the configuration of values that gave rise to it is no longer shared. Thus, a monument can be of value to the preservationist even if its symbolism is deemed outdated and its artistic merits doubtful. In the Ukrainian case, to engage in undifferentiated iconoclasm could be seen as adopting the logic of the invaders, who attempted to make Ukraine's monumentscape conform to their own vision of history. It is to effect total destruction from above rather than spontaneous and partial destruction from below.[5] This has been very much on the minds of Ukrainian opponents of iconoclasm: in the village of V'iazova in the L'viv region, a furious resident told representatives of the regional government who were demolishing a local war memorial, "You are acting just like Putin!"[6]

Monuments are also, much more so than two-dimensional political imagery, *material objects* in space that can orient everyday life. Especially in urban settings, they often become landmarks whose significance is no longer tied to their original political message and whose removal can leave a void that continues to be felt long after they are gone.

The final aspect is the *habitual* one, which is closely tied to the material aspect. The ways in which monuments are experienced often have lit-

5 For this distinction, see Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 23.

6 hromadske, "'This is an educational and punitive expedition.' Operation Decolonization/hromadske," Youtube video, 20:17, July 13, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFVZfJng7YU.

tle to do with the original builders' intentions and more with everyday processes of domestication, such as the ones we described extensively in chapter 2. For anyone who interacts with a monument, personal memory and habit can generate a myriad of meanings: perhaps it acted as a backdrop for their first kiss, a familiar sight on their way to work, or a place where to commemorate a loved one, even if that person's death occurred in a context other than that which the monument ostensibly refers to. A monument can thus become a "petrified biography" for those used to it being there.[7]

Taking all of these aspects into account can give us a richer understanding of what a monument—such as a war memorial—means to those people to whom it really matters. To do so is not necessarily to opt for a monument to stay in place in every single case: some monuments can be judged to have a negative valence from multiple perspectives. Yet this multi-dimensional view of monuments can caution us against rash calls for wholesale removal and enrich our understanding of why monuments matter. Beyond the Ukrainian context and beyond war memorials, it is a way to wrest supremacy in monument policy from invaders and occupiers.

7 Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, 83.

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