

Representation of national identity in Dokiia Humenna's novels

by

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## Abstract

This thesis analyzes the formation and gradual development of national identity in Dokiia Humenna's four novels: *Dar Evdotei* (Evdoteia's gift, 1990), *Khreshchatyi iar (Kyiv 1941-43: Roman-khronika)* (The Cross-shaped Ravine (Kyiv 1941-43): A Novel-Chronicle, 1956), *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie* (The Past Flows into the Future, 1978), and *Velyke Tsabe* (The Great Tsabe, 1952). The research explores the way Humenna saw the circumstances and the challenges faced by Ukrainian society under two authoritarian and autocratic regimes (Nazi and Soviet) and the destructive effects of these regimes on the concept of national identification. The project utilizes the notions of myth, collective memory, and cultural trauma in understanding why society retains a certain group identity.

## Анотація

Дисертація аналізує формування та подальший розвиток національної ідентичності у чотирьох романах Докії Гуменної: *Дар Евдої* (1990), *Хрещатий Яр (Київ 1941-43: роман-хроніка)* (1956), *Минуле пливе в прийдешнє* (1978) та *Велике цабе* (1952). В дипломній роботі розглянуто зображення Гуменною обставин та проблем, з якими стикнулося українське суспільство під час його окупації двома авторитарними режимами (нацистським і радянським), а також руйнівний вплив цих режимів на українську національну ідентичність. Дослідження застосовує поняття міфу, колективної пам'яті та культурної травми, задля ширшого розуміння причин збереження суспільством певної групової ідентичності.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter I: Dokiia Humenna’s approach to identity in her memoir</b>	
<i>Dar Evdotei: Ispyt Pamiati (1990).....</i>	<b>7</b>
I.1 Autobiography and identity.....	7
I.2. Formation of national consciousness. Dokiia Humenna’s Childhood.....	12
I.3. Preservation of self in Soviet reality. Literary career.....	20
<b>Chapter II: Collective trauma and crisis of national identity in Dokiia Humenna’s</b>	
<b>novel <i>Khreshchatyi Iar (1956).....</i></b>	<b>33</b>
II.1. Collective memory, cultural trauma, and national identity – methodological approach.....	33
II.2. Interrelations between collective memory, cultural trauma, and national identity in Ukraine during the Second World War.....	38
II.3. The clash of various ideologies in Dokiia Humenna’s novel <i>Khreshchatyi Iar</i> .....	41
II.4. Crises of identities within the shifting ideologies.....	58
<b>Chapter III: Representation of national identity through the prehistoric past in</b>	
<b>two novels <i>Mynule plyve v pryideshnie (The Past Flows into the Future, 1978)</i></b>	
<b>and <i>Velyke Tsabe (The Great Tsabe, 1952).....</i></b>	<b>71</b>
III.1. Myth-making as a response to trauma.....	71
III.2. Ukraine’s pre-Christian identity in <i>Mynule plyve v pryideshnie (1976).....</i>	76
III.3. Connection between generations in <i>Velyke Tsabe (1952).....</i>	87
III.4. Humenna’s vision of national identity.....	91
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>103</b>

## Introduction

“The past is never dead. It's not even past.”

William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

The main goal of this thesis is to yield insights into Dokiia Humenna's works by analyzing her interpretation of national identity. Like many writers of the 1920s and 1930s, she had a strong sense of national identity, which derived from her perceived bond with a distant past and her sense of Ukraine as an independent nation. The study examines Humenna's four novels: *Dar Evdotei* (Evdoteia's gift, 1990), *Khreshchatyi iar* (*Kyiv 1941-43: Roman-khronika* (The Cross-shaped Ravine (Kyiv 1941-43): A Novel-Chronicle, 1956), *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie* (The Past Flows into the Future, 1978), and *Velyke Tsabe* (The Great Tsabe, 1952). It is conceived as a case study in how national identity is defined in one writer's work.

Humenna is an example of a writer who created outside her homeland, in emigration, because in the interwar years she was repressed and expelled from national cultural life by the Soviet regime. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of an independent Ukraine in 1991 her books started to attract the attention of the literary public in Ukraine.

She wrote over twenty books, which were novels, travelogues and short story collections. As a totality her oeuvre can be viewed as a depiction of twentieth-century Ukraine through the fusion of autobiography and memoirs, political and social commentary, as well as literary and cultural history. Her diary, entitled “Materialy do povisty Hnizdo nad bezodneiu” (Materials for the novel *A Nest Over the Abyss*, 1941-43), is a manuscript that was later reworked and became her novel *Khreshchatyi iar* (*Kyiv 1941-43: Roman-khronika*) (The Cross-shaped Ravine (Kyiv 1941-43): A Novel-Chronicle, 1956)). It is stored at the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre (Oseredok) in Winnipeg. This manuscript is an eyewitness account of the years of the German occupation of Kyiv, and the latter novel is

based on it. Ukrainska Vilna Academiai Nauk UVAN – The Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in New York is considered one of the largest depositories of archival materials dealing with the Ukrainian postwar emigration. It includes Humenna's archive and contains almost all her personal papers. Other diaries and personal letters can be found in Humenna's archives at the Immigration History Research Center (Minneapolis, Minnesota), the archive of Taras Shevchenko Scientific Society (New York, New York) as well as in the archives of the Ukrainian National Museum (Chicago, Illinois) (Sarancha 2016, 97-98).

Although Humenna's works provide valuable materials for analysis, there is no definitive study of her literary achievements, and there has been no serious discussion of her views on national identity. Furthermore, much of her novels have never been analyzed. Only a few of them have been commented upon by critics like Iurii Boiko, Vasyl Chaplenko, Oleksandra Chernova, Volodymyr Derzhavyn, Olena Kolomiets, Hryhorii Kostiuk, Oksana Liaturynska, Volodymyr Melnyk, Iurii Mykolyn, Anatolii Iuryniak, Vadym Pepa, Anatolii Pohribnyi, Taamara Sadivska, Halyna Sarancha, Iurii Sherekh, Myroslav Shkandrij, Petro Soroka, Iaroslav Stekh, and Ostap Tarnavskyy. There is a limited amount of available and reliable secondary data, and a distinct lack of research on the topic.

The issue of national identity is an extremely complex and intricate one for Ukraine, because of the country's historically shifting borders. The anthropologist Zagorka Golubovic states that in a time of social and civilizational crisis the issue of identity becomes particularly accentuated, because "when turbulence shakes all the existing values and principles, and breaks down the established life schemes without yet ensuring new ones, this leaves individuals in a vacuum of social norms and their increasing uncertainty and insecurity" (Golubovic 1999, 26). Over the past centuries the Ukrainian people who today live within the borders of the Ukrainian state were absorbed into one or another empire. During the Second World War Ukraine found itself overrun by two totalitarian regimes. The war and the large-scale social changes undertaken by the Soviet and Nazi regimes imposed a

dramatic imprint on Ukrainian society. This historical experience caused internal divisions in Ukrainian society and is still hotly debated among historians. Contemporary Ukrainian intellectuals are aware of the need to confront painful episodes in history if civil society is to fully develop and if past tragedies are not to repeat themselves. Olia Hnatiuk argues that today's intellectual elites have the urgent tasks of constructing a national identity that "will confront the Soviet one and at the same time will unify a society that is diverse in terms of history, language, religion, and culture" (Hnatiuk 2005, 17).

The theme of the Soviet past and its impact on national identification, along with a focus on women protagonists, dominate Humenna's works. Her novels also depict the themes of traumatic experience under totalitarian regimes, human psychology during Soviet times, the life of immigrants, women's experience, prehistoric life, mythology, and archaeology. These works provide the reader with a historical context that includes not only the twentieth century, but also the previous seven thousand years. They cover time frames that can be divided into two main categories: the contemporary society and the prehistoric one. On the surface, the two time frames are completely different, but in reality they are closely intertwined and complement one another, especially concerning the question of national identity. Whether they deal with pre-history or the present, almost all Humenna's novels reflect or are based on personal experience and autobiographical materials. They all suggest the importance of cultural memory in dealing with the experience of a totalitarian society.

Soviet remembrance, in Catherine Merridale's view, "was oppressively masculine, from the parades of weaponry to the goose-stepping youths and the veterans in the stands. But the majority of the population, and, above all, of those who grieved and remembered, was female" (Merridale 1999, 77). Therefore, it is critical to analyze the concept of collective memory, cultural trauma, and reconstruction of national identity from women's perspective. Humenna's women-centered works with their prominent female protagonists are based on the author's personal life stories and examine the way individuals have imagined the Ukrainian



nation. An analysis of this aspect of her works is of central importance in assessing her literary achievement. This thesis will seek answers to some of the following questions: How is Ukrainian identity presented in Humenna's novels? What are the values of Ukrainian identity for Humenna? How, in her view, did this identity arise? Why does Humenna feel it was so important for Ukrainians to self-identify as a nation with an ancient history? What did she think was the influence of ancient ancestors on the formation of future eras? What for her was the importance of historical memory in the struggle of Ukrainians to transform themselves into a fully sovereign nation?

The approach will consist of interpreting the works by focusing on character, plot, dialogue and authorial comment. It will also use biographical and historical materials to establish the social and political climate in which Dokiia Humenna wrote. The thesis will support its findings with reference to critical essays dealing with the subject of national identity (Smith 1991, 2003; Kelman 2001; Bhabha 1994; Golubovic 1999; Hnatiuk 2005; Said 1993), autobiography (Bruner 1987; Hellbeck 2009; Marcus 2014; Rippl 2013), trauma (Alexander et al. 2004; Caruth 1996; Neal 2005; Sztompka 2004), cultural and collective memory (Assman 2008; Connerton 1989; Crawford & Foster 2007; Halbwachs 1992; Kansteiner 2008; Lachmann 2008; Neal 2005; Sztompka 2004), matriarchy (Lesiv 2013; Burdo & Videiko 2008; Eller 2000; Rubchak 2001, 2009; Whitmont 1982), and nationalism (Anderson 1999; Connor 1994; Gat 2013; Smith 1996, 1998, 2001). The field of memory studies has been used to explore the ways in which society constructs a sense of the past. Collective memory is used in this thesis to refer to everyday experiences and biographical remembrances of the more recent past, an understanding of the past that is formed and transmitted by ordinary people through various forms of communication. Cultural memory, on the other hand, is used to refer to the formal history that is preserved by specialists and objectified in texts, rites, monuments, and paintings.

While this thesis does raise questions for future researchers, its aim is not methodological, but primarily to analyze the novels with reference to the author's personal experience, and to examine her depiction of the way individual representatives of Ukrainian society coped with the Soviet regime, the Second World War, emigration and the political changes that took place during these decades.

The thesis consists of three chapters. The first two chronicle major traumas in Humenna's life in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s. In her works the author depicts how the collective sadness, fear, disappointment, and anger, brought on by totalitarian regimes during that time, influence Ukrainian identity. Chapter one focuses on her approach to national identity in the memoir *Dar Evdotei* (Evdoteia's Gift, 1990). It also examines the author's life and works from the viewpoints of different researchers and literary critics. Humenna's memoir portrays the way ordinary Ukrainians experienced the traumas and opportunities of the revolutionary and Stalinist eras of Soviet history, and in particular what these events meant to Ukrainian women and writers. She vividly shows the social and intellectual influences of the Soviet regimes on Ukrainian collective identity, especially during these three decades.

Humenna shows how the impact of war upon society was overwhelming; it changed everything, overturning established organizations of community and identity and creating psychological disorders and socioeconomic destruction. Ukraine served as a battlefield between two murderous regimes – Soviet and Nazi. People often made attempts to reshape their everyday lives within the system in order to survive and/or strengthen their position in the new circumstances. Humenna captures the dilemmas faced during the period of German occupation, by depicting society's fears, anxieties, and hopes. War dictated the need to restate that national identities in Ukraine were not fixed for all time and in all places. Therefore, chapter two analyzes how Humenna in her novel *Khreshchatyi iar* portrays the individual and collective traumas suffered by war victims and how these traumas influenced their sense of

national identity. A discussion of this book is important because it indicates an “Eastern” (mainstream) Ukrainian perspective on the wartime experience. Humenna depicts the Ukrainian people as stuck in a state of confusion and entangled in a conflict between multiple cultures and identities.

The tendency to resurrect ancient myths about the prehistoric stage of development and an age of matriarchal rule can be considered a response to trauma. The function of such myths is probably best understood as a therapeutic attempt to support and legitimate society by emphasizing a shared descent with a long-established system of values and norms. Humenna’s interest in prehistoric culture first emerged when she was banned from writing in Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s. By tracing the heritage of empowered Ukrainian women and emphasizing the ancient origin of Ukraine, she no doubt tried to help her readers cope with personal as well as collective traumas. Chapter three focuses specifically on how Humenna links the formation of national identity with a prehistoric past by showing ancient tribal society evolving around the cult of the Great Goddess. Furthermore, this chapter analyzes Humenna’s views concerning the role and accomplishments of women in a matriarchal culture, which, she claims, have left traces in Ukraine. Throughout her two novels, *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie* (The Past Flows into the Future, 1978) and *Velyke Tsabe* (The Great Tsabe, 1952), Humenna tries to demonstrate the historical evidence for these ideas. The main goal of her novels about the matrilineal social order is to prove that after countless alien occupations and expansions, Ukraine has preserved its traditions of moral behaviour, ethical consciousness, established rituals and traditions, and that these are rooted in the prehistoric era. Furthermore, Humenna argues that awareness of these ties can serve as a guide for imagining a contemporary national community.

## Chapter I

Dokiia Humenna's approach to identity in her memoir

*Dar Evdotei: Ispyt Pamiati (1990)*

One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution;  
one makes a revolution in order to establish a dictatorship.

George Orwell, 1984

This chapter examines Humenna's concept of identity as it is expressed in her memoirs, which were only published a few years before her death but which she wrote throughout her life. At the end of her life she gathered her notes and diaries, edited them and prepared them for publication. Some sections of these notes had been used in previous publications, but this is the most completed version of her diary.

### I.1. Autobiography and identity

National identity is both an individual's social identity and a collective phenomenon that unites peoples into a single national group with a "conception of its enduring characteristics and basic values; its strengths and weaknesses; its hopes and fears; its reputation and conditions of existence; its institutions and traditions; and its past history, current purposes, and future prospects" (Kelman 2001, 191). According to Herbert C. Kelman, the integrity of national identity is of critical importance for several reasons: first, because of its distinctiveness and the sense of belonging it brings to group members; second, because of the sense of ownership of the land and resources; and finally, because it offers a foundation for cultural development, a way of life, and religious beliefs (ibid., 191).

Jerome Bruner argues that autobiographical memory is inextricably interwoven with

identity. He makes a forceful case for the value of narratives (“life writing”) because they determine our sense of who we are and what our place is in cultural contexts of time and space. He goes on to say that “narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative. ‘Life’ in this sense is the same kind of construction of the human imagination as ‘a narrative’ is. It is constructed by human beings through active ratiocination, by the same kind of ratiocination through which we construct narratives. When somebody tells you his life – and that is principally what we shall be talking about – it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a through-the-clear-crystal recital of something univocally given” (Bruner 1987, 13). The French historian George Gusdorf gives his interpretation of autobiography as a literary genre. He argues that it is “limited in time and space; it has not always existed nor does it exist everywhere...[Its] conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life is the late product of specific civilization” (quoted in Bruner 1987, 16). The scholar remarks that autobiography becomes possible only under certain historical conditions: “The man who takes the trouble to tell of himself knows that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future” (ibid., 16).

Another scholar has described “life writing” as a broad notion that “refers to a wide variety of non-fictional autobiographical and biographical texts, including memoirs, diaries, journals, testimonies, letters, autobiographies, personal essays, and sometimes also biographies” (Rippl 2013, 5). Therefore, memoirs can be considered as only one form of life writing among many. They provide an important retrospective of historical knowledge about a period in which the writer used to live and work. Memoirs serve as an important medium of cultural memory that contributes significantly to the construction of collective identities.

The prevailing forms of collective identity officially recognized by communist authority in the Soviet Union was ideological and class identity. Literature as a part of the state’s ideological machinery endured a long and tortuous evolutionary process during Soviet times. Zagorka Golubovic characterizes “Real Socialism” as “a totalitarian model of

identification demanding subordination of individual creeds to a so-called social cause, which in fact relied on the party/state commands” (Golubovic 1999, 28). However, by reflecting personal experience, suffering, and pain in their memoirs and diaries, writers left valuable (published but often unpublished) material that often challenged official ideology and that would be of great value for future generations. Maurice Halbwachs in his book *On Collective Memory* develops a clear distinction between autobiographical and historical memory. The latter reaches the person in indirect ways through “reading and listening or in commemoration and festive occasions,” therefore, “the past is stored and interpreted by social institutions.” Autobiographical memory, on the other hand, based on a personal experience (Halbwachs 1992, 24). Halbwachs also stresses that “society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess” (ibid., 51).

Jochen Hellbeck argues that personal documents such as diaries, letters, and journals became available to scholars only recently from opened Soviet archives. The diary was considered as an “anachronism” during the Stalin era, and “the possession of a personal text could easily become self-incriminating” thus it was impossible to “even conceive of keeping a real diary in those days” (Hellbeck 2009, 3-4). In his memoirs written in 1967, a young Soviet writer Veniamin Kaverin describes the late 1930s and how the air was filled with fine ash from burned diaries: “They [Soviet authority – S.S.] are burning memory, they have been doing it for a long time, every night . . . I lose my mind when I think that every night thousands of people throw their diaries into the fire” (quoted in Hellbeck 2009, 4). Hellbeck argues that when thinking about self-expression under the Stalin’s rule “we think that the state denied its citizens the ability to express themselves, and that individuals’ true thoughts and aspirations were voiced only in private realms, shielded from the intrusive gaze of the state. We think that in their private core, Soviet citizens differed qualitatively from the way they presented

themselves “officially.” We see these people as liberal subjects: individuals in pursuit of autonomy who cherished privacy as a sphere of free self-determination. In this view, [critically thinking] Soviet citizens surely stood in opposition to the Soviet state, given its determination to destroy their autonomy and privacy” (ibid., 3).

These personal experiences often challenge official ideology, and thus were usually published in emigration. Dokiia Humenna was one of those writers who were drawn to writing diaries because in them she was able to express herself in times that did not encourage speaking openly or publishing. Humenna uses the genre of autobiography as an instrument of self-understanding, therapy, a mechanism to come to terms with the psychological loss her community suffered under Soviet rule. With her attention to details and the texture of everyday life, her autobiographical materials contribute to our growing knowledge not only about her personal life but also about the social life of Ukrainians at the time.

Vadym Pepa, in one of his articles, wrote that the most priceless thing Humenna took with her while emigrating after the war was “a pile of draft-manuscripts; that was all her wealth; she [...] took only what could be valuable for the treasury of Ukrainian literature” (Pepa 2004, 10). Nevertheless, a lot of her notes were lost or destroyed. As a child, Dokiia used her journals to compose stories and poems. Her personal ideological position started to form while studying at school, when she constantly noted her thoughts about relations with the world and her place in it. Throughout her life she continued keeping journals, recording in them her daily activities and reflections, as well as drafts of her writing. Her journals and diaries became an inseparable fellow traveler for her. Near the end of her life Humenna confessed in a letter to her friend Iryna Dybko-Phylypchack: “Now I am retyping my journal and I can do only this. I am still in the middle of it, but there are already 1700 finished pages. I do not know if it can be useful for anybody, but I keep retyping and ... I have no idea how to store it...” (quoted in Pepa 2004, 11). It is evident from this that Humenna’s diaries played a

significant role in her life, as they became a memory aid serving to remind the author of forgotten events.

Her memoirs *Dar Evdotei* first appeared in 1990 in North America, but they are mainly based on notes and diaries written during the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union. She started working on her memoirs in 1972 by retyping her diaries and recalling turning points in her life: “I am sixty eight years old, I think there won’t be any personal events in my life, so it is time to write it [life]. To recreate it. That will be an exercise for [my] memory” (Humenna 2004, 20). Pepa argues that a significant portion of the described events were recaptured from the author’s memory with the help of “hundreds of diaries, thousands of pages, that Humenna was working through till the end of her life” (Pepa 2004, 12). Furthermore, he highlights “the great scale and credibility of the depicted facts” (ibid.). For Humenna this “examination of memory” was a manifestation of the need to rehabilitate memory, which in the repressive conditions of censorship in the Soviet Union in the 1930s had been surrounded and permeated by taboos. She claims: “There was no one to talk to about my thoughts because they did not have the right to live during that time [when everybody had to think according to the way Soviet authorities desired S.S.]. Therefore, I have to write this autobiography” (Humenna 2004, 4). By examining *Dar Evdotei* this chapter aims to shed light on the process of Humenna's national identity-building and her attitude to Soviet reality.

Humenna's memoirs describe relationships, friendships that enriched her, and encounters that determined the course of her life. The writer recollects some of the essential influences and touchstone events that shaped her mind and contributed to the formation of her national consciousness. She is self-critical and self-ironic at the same time. Each of her decisions is evaluated as a step towards emancipation, towards selfhood. Petro Soroka states that Humenna’s memoirs are "not only a contemplative chronicle but also a carnival of metaphors and swirl of associations.” He goes on to say: “It seems as through the ‘voice’



from the pages of her diary is quiet and turned towards herself; that is why it happens to be a thrilling, honest, and confessional conversation with self and/or God" (Soroka 2003, 467).

Vadym Pepa describes Humenna's memoirs in the following way: "This is a confession without any predefined [...] and cleverly disguised plan. I would call it a natural expression. [...] Humenna is so naively sincere and clear in her writing [...] From this perspective the writer's memoirs are not only of great interest to the reader or the general public but also to professional psychologists. Writing the self is one of the rare expressions of self-revelation of the human soul" (Pepa 2004, 7).

Humenna considers her memoirs representative of the experiences of other people that lived at the same period. She describes this era as a grey reality: "My life is poor in external events, but full of internal feelings, emotions, and worries. It is possible to say that my external biography is not individualistic, but repeats the destiny of those who were born just before the revolution and experienced the well-known grey existence" (Humenna 2004, 20).

In her memoirs, Humenna depicts her evolving love of literature, which, according to the book's title, was a *dar* (gift /mission) granted to her by nature. For the second part of the title (*Evdoteia*) she uses the Greek alternative of her full name Evdokiia.<sup>1</sup> Humenna's biographical sketch is rendered in a non-linear and fragmented narrative form. Each of *Dar Evdoteia*'s two volumes consists of three chapters. She addresses the reader in the following way: "Do not be surprised that I am repetitive; with this repetitiveness, I want to experience everything over again. I am not writing for you. I am writing for myself" (ibid., 38). There are also some gaps in the reconstruction of Humenna's past which either signal absence of memories or blank periods and intentional silences.

## I.2. Formation of national consciousness. Dokiia Humenna's Childhood

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<sup>1</sup> In her work the author mentions that in Greek mythology Evdoteia (Eidothea) is a sea nymph. According to Homer's *Odyssey*, she was Poseidon's granddaughter who helped and protected sea travellers (Humenna 1990, 457).

Dokiia Humenna was born on the March 23, 1904 in the village Zhashkiv, which is in Central Ukraine, south of Kyiv. She describes her first childhood memories in the following way: “The first thing that I remember is a deep sorrow for something that used to exist but will never be here again. Something remarkable, dear, and precious. Everything that surrounds us is alien, boring, and cold. I am a foreigner here” (ibid., 20). Humenna says she felt this way since she was a three-year-old, small, crying child, but no one knew what kind of “adult” sorrow she was carrying: “It was an old soul’s grief in a small child” (ibid., 32).

Humenna portrays her parents as very different from one another. *Dar Evdotei* is dedicated to her father, Kuzma Humennyi. Although Dokiia was very close to her mother, it was her father who inspired her to become a writer. She informs that he grew up and lived in the village but hated household chores and considered himself an artist. Her father was a keen reader and always wanted to get an education, but difficult times never gave him a chance. His parents constantly repeated that he would not be able to “eat bread from books” (ibid., 24). Therefore, he passed on his unfulfilled dreams to his daughter Dokiia.

The sweetest and most precious memories of her life belong to the time when she together with her sisters and her mother went to the village of her mother’s relatives. Relationships in their family were harmonious and joyful. According to Humenna, it was an “atmosphere of purity and noble poverty. They did not know how to cheat and how to become rich by fraud” (ibid., 41). Moreover, they maintained many elements of ancestral culture, therefore, for Humenna they were seen as the bearers of a “pure” Ukrainian identity. The village was located in a secluded area surrounded by the beauty of Ukrainian nature. For Humenna this landscape represented the core of Ukraine, and she valued and enjoyed every moment spent there (ibid., 38). Her personal identity is connected with the identity of specific places and spaces. Moreover, it is here that her sense of a national identity emerged and took shape. Azar Gat, similarly to Humenna, sees the countryside as a “cradle” of national identity: “Modern national identity was famously forged in, and propagated from, the cities –

the hubs of power, education, and communication – by intellectuals and the middle classes. But [...] it was the countryside that was perceived as the true repository of national identity, and it was mainly from rural materials of language and custom that it was forged. Whereas the elite and urban middle class often assimilated into a hegemonic foreign culture, the countryside retained the traditional culture and identity” (Gat 2013, 15).

Humenna gives her father's family a negative assessment: "gentleness on the surface, but endless war inside, which causes a stuffy atmosphere [...] When granny treats you well for some reason, it always seems she is counting all this because she is stingy” (Humenna 2004, 43). On the other hand, the natural generosity and openness of her relatives on the mother's side unintentionally aroused in the child respect not only for noble people, but also for their heritage.

The linguistic-cultural space in which Humenna grew up played a significant role in the formation of the writer's national consciousness. Her identification with Ukrainian folklore took root in early childhood: "I was not a sociable child. I did not play games with others [...]. What I loved, and just drank in thirstily were tales" (ibid., 28).

Humenna's book is full of traditional sayings, songs, proverbs, which she learned from her surroundings, especially from her mother: "Very imperceptibly and naturally my mom transferred to me the wisdom of folklore, its world view, and a codex of everyday behaviour, which evoked a thirst for knowledge" (ibid., 63). She also states: "Proverbs were always and constantly on my mother's lips; they can describe everything, the entire code of ethics and morality. They emerge from my mind now, without hearing or uttering them. The computer in my head recorded them. Everything that I call to mind I write onto the blank pages of Hrinchenko's dictionary<sup>2</sup>" (ibid., 29). On October 30, 1949 she made a note in her diary that she also planned “to record songs that reflect matriarchy in present Ukrainian

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<sup>2</sup> Borys Hrinchenko (Grinchenko) is a well-known Ukrainian writer, language expert, historian, and ethnographer. He put together the first *Slovar Ukrainskoi Movy* (Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language) (1907-1909).

reality, in this place where she [woman/mother S.S.] ruled and remained the unchallenged keeper of morality. There is no life situation [in Ukrainian songs S.S.] that takes place without the mother's participation" (quoted in Shvets 2016, 123). Such an enthusiasm for folklore became one of the foundations of Humenna's national identity. In this context it is useful to recall Anthony D. Smith's definition of national identity as "the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identifications of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements" (Smith 2001, 18). He argues that nations emerged from earlier ethnic communities which shared traits such as traditions, memories, language, a belief in common descent, and a sense of collective identity which reached far into the past.

In the first part of her memoirs entitled "Zhashkiv Thursdays" Humenna describes the most remarkable recollections of her childhood, the *vechornytsi* (traditional gatherings with music, songs, jokes, and rituals) which were held every Thursday evening in Zhashkiv. These events were an embodiment of folk customs and rituals, which Humenna always kept in her memory. According to Marian J. Rubchak, *vechornytsi* were organized by the youth as evening gatherings in the northern regions of Ukraine (until the mid-1950s) and "permitted young people to become better acquainted before selecting their life partners" (Rubchak 2009, 133).

Ukrainians are well-known for their love of traditional folk songs, which always accompany every family gathering. Humenna recalls her childhood memory, when her family, which she calls "*chumak* ancestors," "gathered around the table and sing together a song about *chumaks* [...] Such a song is sung as a prayer slowly, leisurely, focused, with tenderness and sensitiveness for the *chumak's* fate, who fell ill in the middle of a field and had no one to tell what hurt" (Humenna 2004, 45). *Chumak* or salt trader was a historic occupation in Ukraine. It was the name given to merchants or traders, who in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries traveled throughout Ukraine in large convoys. The style of living of *chumaks* left its mark on the Ukrainian folklore, language, and culture.

A wedding celebration in the village was full of folk traditions. It triggered in Humenna “an incredible and mystical feeling” (ibid., 46). A wedding would last for a whole week and featured a rich assortment of folk music, dancing, and singing, with rituals dating back to the pre-Christian era. Humenna describes it in the following way: “The action goes on constantly, one thing after another [...], everyone sings and all songs are appropriate – amusing and cheerful, but when necessary they can be very sad; in this later case, everyone would be crying. I was very little back then, and I did not know ethnography [...] I wish I could go back! Something terrifically powerful was blowing on me. I enjoyed every detail” (ibid., 46). Clearly these holidays full of Ukrainian traditions, during which a whole family gathers together to celebrate, left a vivid imprint on Humenna’s childhood.

Language serves as a powerful trigger in Humenna’s sense of national consciousness. Throughout her book, she always stresses the importance of language, by claiming that it is what makes us who we are. From an early age (five to six) she determined that her identification was Ukrainian, and she spoke only Ukrainian. A striking example of this is the following situation: “I was alone on the street, and a girl about my age said that she wanted to get acquainted with me. However, I answered ‘I do not want to.’ She kept asking me ‘Why?’ It was simply because she spoke Russian” (ibid., 51). Language was the primary indicator that appears to have distinguished her from other children in her small town.

Books played a determining role in shaping and influencing Humenna’s imagination. She learned how to read when she was five years old; from that time Humenna was never without a book. She recalls this obsession in the following words: “I was so into books, that I slept with them, ate with them, and even did my household chores with them” (ibid., 59). She proclaims: “I read eagerly because there was a world in books that was different from my surroundings [...]. Books opened a new world, that was more real for me than the physical

one” (ibid., 91). By reading classics of Ukrainian literature, Humenna compared her language with the literary one. In this way she realized that steps towards education were automatically considered as steps away from her rural environment: "I already started to be critical of my speech. I was trying to speak in literary Ukrainian, the same way that was written in the books.” However, her relatives spoke in a dialect. That is why Humenna “in order not to be different from them, instinctively spoke to them in the same language” (ibid., 83). Hence, Humenna became acutely aware of the fact that spiritual growth required certain concessions and an awareness of the distance that separated one from rural surroundings.

Even in emigration, Humenna continued to pursue a respectful attitude towards the Ukrainian literary language. When she was offered the possibility of publication in English she refused, saying: "The work of a Ukrainian writer should appear first in Ukrainian, and only afterwards, should an author dream of translation" (ibid., 158). She claims: “We do not know the beauty and subtlety of our language and we do not want to know it. The word is our weapon, but we so carelessly neglect it. We have to refine, polish, and sharpen it” (ibid., 440).

The image of Taras Shevchenko, the great nineteenth-century poet, held a special place in the spiritual life of Humenna’s family. His portrait hung on the wall in their house and her father always read the writer’s poems aloud. Humenna even compares his destiny and features with her father’s: “The same dejected thoughtfulness on the face, overhung mustache, and something else elusive – probably facial structure and high forehead? Or maybe? ... Father’s childhood resembled Shevchenko’s. An orphan, sisters who looked after him, an unkind stepmother, an attraction to art... Or maybe he was just the same type? [...] because we had common ancestors – *haidamakas* [peasant rebels in eighteenth century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, S.S.]. Every outlying district had a distinctive dialect, and also physical type and facial expressions” (ibid., 70). According to Petro Iwanyshyn, the cult of Shevchenko has served and continues to serve as an important factor in Ukrainian nation-

building. The writer is considered to be a prophet and is revered by many as the messiah of the Ukrainian nation. (Ivanyshyn 2001, 72) This cult was considered by many authorities as a counter-revolutionary element during Soviet times. The anthropologist Paul Connerton points out that the rituals of honouring a certain person can be seen as “commemorative ceremonies” that help modern people to experience a spiritual connection and to form collective memories about the past. According to Connerton, repetition of rituals “automatically implies continuity with the past” (Connerton 1989, 45). Humenna argues that Shevchenko’s personality was similar to her family because of his “simple language, aspirations, way of thinking. He was the same as we are, thus, an integral part of our lives [...]. He spoke the ‘peasant’ language, using our expressions, sayings, legends; he sang our songs” (Humenna 2004, 70). Anthony Smith claims that some national figures often acquire the status of “heroes/messiahs.” They contribute to the formation of national identity by being seen as representatives of the people who are ‘authentic’ – pure, true, pristine, originary – and as such rooted in the soil of the homeland. Their message is still relevant, they provide models of conduct, and their exploits are true *exempla virtutis*, worthy of emulation in each generation” (Smith 2003, 41).

Humenna’s scope of reading was vast. When she was a young girl, besides Shevchenko’s poems, she continuously read numerous works by other writers, which shaped her literary tastes: "I developed an infallible feeling concerning what was real literature, what captivates and does not let go until the last line, and what is a simple craft or/and the work of a mediocrity" (Humenna 2004, 71). The Norwegian author Knut Hamsun was one of her favourite writers at that time. Humenna mentions that his novel *Pan* (1894) “conquers and captures [the reader – S.S.] from the first lines” and “nothing can be compared to it” (ibid.). She also read literary works by Mykola Hohol, Borys Hrinchenko, Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi, Hustav Danylovskyi, Oleksa Storozhenko, Fedir Dostoevsky and many others who were

included in her father's personal library. Throughout her memoirs, Humenna claims that being a writer became her dream and the main purpose of her life.

A tendency to compare the city with the village is a very common feature of Ukrainian writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Major cities were often dominated by Russians, Poles, or Jews, and constituted predominantly Russian or Polish speaking islands in a sea of Ukrainian speakers. Even though Humenna says she was unable to imagine her life without Kyiv during her adulthood, her village landscapes always personify a purely Ukrainian dimension of life. She was strongly convinced that the pressure of urbanization had caused the loss of a connection with the land, and therefore with the indigenous culture, because the ancestors of modern Ukrainians had been closely attached to the soil (*ibid.*, 57). Furthermore, she states in her memoirs that she associates the Ukrainian peasant woman with the core of the nation: "she will overcome and defeat everything. No matter how many times [enemies] try to break and change her, she stubbornly retraces to her eternal basis – kindness, sincerity, and generosity of her soul" (Humenna 1956, 374). Humenna's natural love of freedom required space and fresh rural scenery from her childhood, although she lived in a small town until 1922. She recalls this period in the following way: "We were between the city and the village. We were cut off from the peasantry but still tried to keep the rural way of life." However, Humenna wanted "wider horizons" (Humenna 2004, 57).

### I.3. Preservation of self in Soviet reality. Literary career

After the establishment of a national government in 1917-20 and then a Soviet republic in 1923, along with the policy of Ukrainization, Ukrainian cultural life began to flourish. It was the time of the so-called Cultural Renaissance. According to Petro Soroka: "Literary life thrived with immense force during those years. People [...] could listen to writers' [presentations and talks] for hours. To be a writer was considered prestigious and



reputable” (quoted in Sarancha 2016, 104). Ostap Tarnavskiy, a Ukrainian poet and literary critic who emigrated from Ukraine to Canada after the Second World War at the same time as Humenna, wrote that her literary career began during the “time of the prolonged Ukrainian national struggle that was awakened by the national revolution of 1917-20.” He goes on to say that later “the struggle for a national state led to a conflict with the Bolshevik regime and the forces of Russification” (Tarnavskiy 1999, 177). After Humenna graduated from grade two, she studied in the gymnasium in Zvenyhorodka (Cherkasy region) for a year. In 1920 she entered a new pedagogical school in Stavyschi (Kyiv region), where the urge to devote herself to literature awoke in her.

Her first literary sketch, “U stepu” (In the Steppe), was published in 1924, and thereafter her prose began appearing in Soviet Ukrainian literary journals. While studying in the literature and linguistics department at the Instytut Narodnoi Osvity (Institute of National Education) in 1922-1926, Humenna published her first short stories and joined the Union of Peasant Writers, or Pluh (Plough), founded by Serhii Pylypenko. The ideology of this literary organization was to unify peasant writers and was proclaimed in the following way: “The peasantry with a revolutionary consciousness is the future proletariat; they are the workers of the land. The slogans of proletarian culture are their slogans. Arm-in-arm with the proletariat against bourgeois culture – their tactics” (quoted in Shkandrij 1992, 32). Because of the way Pluh promoted the Soviet regime’s ideology, this organization later became highly controversial. However, according to Hryhorii Kostyuk, “despite its later ugliness, at first, this movement played a great organizational role, and was considered to be the collector, consolidator, and stimulator of new creative revolutionary forces” (quoted in Sarancha 2016, 103). Myroslav Shkandrij describes Pluh as “the first successful mass Ukrainian literary organization” the main goal of which was “the spread of literacy and the popularization of literary problems” by forming clubs, study groups and giving courses; organizing lectures, discussions, literary evenings and performances; opening bookstores, kiosks, and so on

(Shkandrij 1992, 30-31). He goes on to argue that “membership was made extremely easy. One did not, in effect, have to be a writer” (ibid.). Thus, for young Humenna it was the best possibility to start her literary career. She recalls that she brought her application for admission directly to Pylypenko: “A few more future Pluh members were seated there as well. Among them were Hryhorii Kosiachenko, Ievhen Brasiuk, Antin Shmyhelskyi [...], Iakiv Kovalchuk... I was the only girl there. But it did not bother me” (Humenna 2004, 182). Pylypenko accepted her right away. Thus, Humenna started to call him “my literary father.” She states: “If not for him and his noticing a confused frightened girl [Humenna] [...] I would never have been able to write anything” (ibid., 189).



Dokiia Humenna with Pluh’s members (1924).

Front row (left to right): D. Humenna, Ia. Kachura, S. Shchupak, A. Shmyhelskyi,  
V. Nechaiivska.

Back row (left to right): B. Kovalenko, D. Falkivskyi, E. Brasiuk, H. Kosiachenko, Iu. Budiak.

(Humenna 2004, 197)

At the beginning of her literary career, Humenna, as a proletarian student, sincerely believed in the idea of socialism. Therefore, her first works were consistent with the ideas of the Communist Party and the ideological requirements of that time. Hryhorii Kosynka, who was a leading Ukrainian writer of the 1920s, ridiculed one of her works, “Savka” (dedicated to the death of Lenin) by saying: “Paper tolerates everything!” (Humenna 2004, 200).

Humenna, who highly admired Kosynka’s short stories and respected his talent and opinions, accepted his criticism and began to search for a different style. The young writer tried her hand at different literary genres (comic, satirical, detective), but all her efforts she called “fiascos” and “failures”. During this period Humenna was frequently in a dejected state: “Depression and oppression were strongly ingrained in my psyche. I thought about what caused this twilight of my soul. Malnutrition? Absence of money? Insecurity and despair? Or the collapse of the dream of becoming a writer?” (ibid., 248).

The young writer was timid and shy during Pluh’s weekly meetings. She says: “I sat quietly like an incorporeal ghost. I wasn’t able to pronounce a single word. I cannot express myself when there are more than two people, and here among these rhetoricians [it was even worse] (ibid., 188). Humenna was ashamed to read her works in front of other writers. Once, she presented one of her melancholic prose writings and was “cruelly ridiculed” by Pluh’s members. They called her an “infertile heifer” or compared her with “furniture” that just stood in the room without any intellectual productivity. After such a frustrating experience she locked her thoughts deep inside herself: “I realized that this type of theme [lyrical, personal, romantic etc. – S.S.] is considered ‘escape from reality,’ ‘spineless,’ ‘not ideological,’ ‘dangerous political indifference, which is not proletarian but bourgeois ideology.’ ‘Art for art’s sake’ – no one needs all that” (ibid.).

Humenna experienced a constant struggle with personal imperfections and low self-esteem: “At the university I had the status of a poor peasant girl. I was aware [of that status] all the time and behaved accordingly. My natural timidity and shyness was exacerbated

because of that, and this paralyzed me. I cringed and tried to be invisible [...] However, I also tried to get from Kyiv everything that was accessible” (ibid., 176). Because of her uncertainty and at the same time curiosity, Humenna often acted as a “silent witness” to the events that surrounded her, the literary life of that period, and the life of ordinary residents. She states that although that particular time did not bring her many friendships, it allowed her the opportunity for observation “my favourite type of assignment” (ibid., 97).

Several places left their mark on Humenna’s personality and influenced her works. Among them she counts Kuban, Turkmenistan, and especially Kyiv, where she spent almost all of her adult life while in Ukraine. She liked to take long walks alone, or with friends. Her feelings and experiences were later transposed into her autobiographical or fictional works.

However, Humenna also recalls this period of her life as the most desperate; it was full of hunger and poverty. Physically she was in a devastated condition, so much so that she could not clearly hear the content of lectures: “I learned not to cause trouble to anyone, to look through the window full of goodies and to say: I do not want it! Clothes? It was enough for me to wear a skirt made of a burlap bag. No shoes? I walked barefoot” (ibid., 166). She goes on to say: “Starvation and moral pressure exhausted me” (ibid.). Nonetheless, these circumstances never affected her desire to learn.

Humenna was fascinated by history, Ukrainian and foreign literatures. In her memoirs she describes the atmosphere that prevailed in the artistic environment of Kyiv in the early twentieth century. For her, life and literature were inextricably intertwined. She was fortunate to attend different lectures by the most prominent Ukrainian scholars and writers, such as Mykola Zerov, Mykola Khvylovyi, Vasyl Ellan-Blakytnyi, Pavlo Tychyna, and Volodymyr Sosiura (ibid., 181, 185). She was especially fascinated by Khvylovyi’s presentation of his two short stories “Sosny hudut” (Buzz of the pine) and “Ia” (I): “There is a dead silence around, no one is breathing. This is the first time I have heard of Mykola Khvylovyi. The author’s lyrical manner is sending mystical goosebumps all over my back. What kind of

technique is he using to keep the full hall of people in tension? [...] Ever since I do not remember such a magical effect of a reading on a mass” (Humenna 2004, 182).

Zerov’s lectures provided Humenna with a profound knowledge of the history of Ukrainian literature. She was fascinated by Zerov’s ability to present material in his class and to attract thousands of students into one room. Furthermore, it was clear from his “smiling face during the lecture, that he was in love with his subject more than anyone” (ibid., 185). He introduced Ukrainian literature as an interesting and coherent phenomenon that was closely related to social, cultural, and historical experiences. Only years later Humenna realized the importance of this personality in Ukrainian academic and literary life: “while listening to him, I had no idea that we were facing the most prominent figure in the literature of our time. Like everyone else in the class, I became a slave of his sorcery” (ibid., 185). In her memoirs, she describes this period as an astonishing renaissance of literary and cultural activity in Soviet Ukraine. Dozens of new writers appeared and formed various literary groups. Humenna wanted above all to be a part of that life. She recalls her first encounters with the writers Hryhorii Kosynka, Borys Antonenko-Davydovych, Todos Osmachka, Serhii Iefremov, Maksym Rylskyi, Mykhailo Drai-Khmara, Volodymyr Sosiura and many other prominent Ukrainian writers and artists of the 1920s. However, this cultural renaissance was brutally quashed by the Stalinist terror of the 1930s. Since then this period in Ukrainian literary history has been called the *Rozstriliane vidrodzhennia*<sup>3</sup> (Executed Renaissance). Those writers who were in opposition to the regime, or who simply had disagreements with its policies, were forced to produce works in the Socialist Realist style, which glorified the Party and Stalin. Humenna recalls: “Writers were accused of pessimism and disagreement with reality when they voiced the slightest sorrow [in their works]. It was only permissible to write in an uplifting manner. Melancholy and anguish were considered as [expressing a]

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<sup>3</sup> The term *Rozstriliane vidrodzhennia* (Executed Renaissance) is used to describe the generation of Ukrainian writers and artists of 1920s and early 1930s in the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic who were repressed or executed by Stalin's totalitarian regime in the thirties.

personal conflict with Soviet authority” (Humenna 2004, 396). Those who refused to capitulate to the Soviet ideology were imprisoned, repressed, or executed by the regime. Nonetheless, persecution did not stop even after that. At literary meetings, each writer had to denigrate the memory of fellow writers who had been arrested or put to death. Humenna describes one of those meetings, during which Hryhorii Kosynka, a victim of Stalin’s repressions, was the centre of attention: “They [Soviet authorities] could not overcome Kosynka’s brilliance. They recalled all his jokes; what, how, and where he said something; found manifestations of “hidden counterrevolutionary” ideas in his novels. However, Kosynka from another world ruled over these people who were devoted [to Soviet rule], these *kosaryks* and *kolesnyks*<sup>4</sup>, because the meeting to convict turned into a memorial service. This was noticed “there” [in Moscow]. Suddenly it was forbidden to even mention the names of the killed and arrested” (ibid., 393). *Dar Evdotei* contains detailed descriptions of the arrest and execution of various writers. In this way it serves as a valuable source for further analysis of this period in Ukrainian literary life.

With the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan decreed by Stalin in 1928 (which involved a rapid industrialization, collectivization and centralization) the editorial staff of *Pluh* sent Humenna as a special correspondent to Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Crimea, and Kuban. By focusing on the life in communes, the young journalist was supposed to popularize collectivization (which involved the elimination of all private farms and state control of all agriculture) and describe the benefits of collective farming. Collectivization was only beginning in 1928-29 and Humenna naively believed that this experiment would lead to positive results. She thought it would encourage a rapid industrialization and an economic development that would benefit the population. However, her natural predisposition to tell the truth caused both the rise and fall of her literary career, almost simultaneously: “I inherited from my mother a disgust for deception and an innate inability to lie” (ibid., 159).

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<sup>4</sup> Kosaryk and Kolesnikov are last names of hack writers and Soviet apologists.

Humenna explains her intentions in the following way: “even though my depiction of events was subjective, it was always truthful, without falsification, exaggeration, and the application of standard clichés from the newspapers. I assumed that the value of such a description was not for the present day, but for future generations, so that they would be aware of how everything was started” (Humenna 1928-32, 4). Based on the material she had collected in these regions, Humenna published a cycle of essays entitled *Lysty iz Stepvoi Ukrainy* (Letters from Steppe Ukraine) (published in *Pluh*, 1928-1929) and *Eh Kuban, ty Kuban khliborobnaia* (Oh, Kuban, agricultural Kuban!) (published in *Chervonyi shlyah*, 1929). Along with a description of the farms that were being modernized with machinery and equipment, the author portrays chaos and poverty in rural areas caused by the new system, along with the decline of social culture, neglect of family values and moral norms. Humenna says that Stalin’s collectivization “affected the village by introducing confiscation of grain, *prodpodatok* [food tax on each kind of agricultural product], and cursing [...] Agriculture and farms are destroyed and declined.” And she asks: “What is the benefit from this? And there is the spectre of hunger” (Humenna 1928, 41). The young author depicted things as she saw them, in a way that contradicted the requirements of her political assignment. Industrialization under Soviet rule was described by her as a destructive rather than a progressive process.

Furthermore, Dokiia’s father Herasym Humennyi was identified as a class enemy (this label was given not because of his hostile actions against the party or state, but simply because of his profession as a merchant). His land was confiscated, and he was persecuted by the authorities. Her parents started to live in terrible conditions and great poverty. The only food they had was potatoes and oil. The rest of the food was taken away by the state to fulfil its plan (Humenna 2004, 352). Humenna compares the life of the peasantry with the life of party members, who constantly “obtained generous meals [...] while [the peasants] were running away, and those who could not, swelled [a symptom of malnutrition – S.S.] and for

the glory of socialism fell into the grave” (ibid., 351). She compares the state with a wolf’s lair: “Do I live in a state of wolves? [...] where some overeat and others die from starvation. What kind of socialism is that? Socialism [is supposed to be] good for everyone” (ibid., 372).

The introduction of the Five-Year Plan became the starting point for mass repression, which involved arrests, deportations, executions, and a system of internal colonization. They also were at this time given “internal” passports, which prevented them from leaving their place of work and living elsewhere. The well-known historian Timothy Snyder describes the realities of that period in the following way:

Collectivization in the early 1930s deprived the peasants of their property, along with all the rights and privileges associated with ownership, and made them dependant upon the state. If peasants had been prosperous before collectivization, or if they resisted what they experience as shocking repression, or if they were denounced, or if they seemed suspicious for any other reason, they were deported to the Gulag, the Soviet system of labor camps and settlements. A decade after collectivization began there were about three million Soviet citizens in the Gulag. (Snyder 2014, 3)

Ukraine was on the Western periphery of the Soviet Union where many of the worst government abuses and greatest mass starvation happened. It suffered the brunt of the Soviet attempt to rapidly modernize itself by implementing complete collectivization of all agriculture. The people and the land were controlled by the state. Lynne Viola, in her work *Stalin’s Empire: The Gulag and Police Colonization in the Soviet Union in the 1930s*, argues that Stalin’s economic development and statebuilding in the 1930s was a kind of “internal colonization,” where the peasantry became an exploitable resource. She claims: “The features of the Soviet internal colony were dehumanized national peasantries, the exploitation of their labor under horrendous conditions, and the brutal regimentation of their existence in the pursuit of extracting raw materials and natural resources” (Viola 2014, 25). Ukraine, as a breadbasket of the Soviet Union, was forced to feed everyone else. As a result, the price of



such rapid industrialization was paid for by an enormous number of human lives.<sup>5</sup> However, a great number of historical as well personal records were distorted throughout the Soviet period. In her memoirs, Humenna writes that the famine of 1932-1933 was officially denied at the time. Thus, people were confused about what was happening: “It is only now that everything has become obvious, in retrospect and with the exposure of Moscow/Stalin’s secret plans to control Ukraine by starvation. However, back then for ordinary people, who were surrounded only by the facts related directly to their lives, all of this was completely unclear” (Humenna 2004, 364). She describes this period as “a year of the most dreadful spread of hunger, a harvest of death. Devastated villages... The newspapers wrote that ‘life has become better; life has become happier’; at the same time, peasants with bundles and covered with lice, had to crawl from the village [...], lay down at the railway stations. Terrifying rumors were spread in whispers. It was forbidden for writers to accomplish their assignments [in the villages]; only trusted members of the party were allowed to go there [...] Cities became small islands surrounded by the sea of starvation” (ibid., 364). Catherine Merridale argues that the example of the 1932-1933 famine illustrates the process of memory destruction at work: “Reports from the area suggested that although food was critically scarce everywhere and prices high, starvation itself was uneven. Some villages were virtually wiped out while others, though suffering, survived. At the same time, refugees from famine areas were to be found at rail heads across [...] Ukraine. Under these circumstances, the denial of mass death – the very word starvation was banned in 1932 – cannot have convinced many people” (Merridale 1999, 74). For Humenna it was very confusing. She could not understand how “the state could strangle its own population” (Humenna 2004, 364). She searched for answers: “I could not understand why the producer of bread was dying without bread. Where

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<sup>5</sup>The Holodomor is the term, describing genocide of the Ukrainian people carried out by the Soviet government in 1932 and 1933. According to Timothy Snyder, “no fewer than 3.3 million Soviet citizens died in Soviet Ukraine of starvation and hunger-related diseases; and about the same number of Ukrainians (by nationality) died in the Soviet Union as a whole (Snyder 2010, 53). Other scholars have put the number of victims considerably higher.

is logic in here? What is the purpose? Why is grain left uncollected from the field and those who were supposed to harvest are dying in the villages and railway stations. Why is taking an ear of wheat from one's own farm, that has been grown by one's own hands, a felony?" (ibid., 364).

Humenna was blacklisted in the early thirties after writing her collection of stories critical of the collectivization campaign, and the Stalinist terror forced her to remain silent until 1939. Her works were labeled as "defective literature" (ibid., 331). She was expelled from Pluh, which meant the "literary death of the writer," because during that period of time only membership in literary organization gave writers the possibility of publishing his/her works. The official reason of such an act was that: "her career in literature has been an open slander on Soviet reality and the collective farm engineering" (quoted in Tarnavskiy 1999, 179). Tarnavskiy depicts this period in Humenna's life in the following way: "The eight years of the writer's forced silence was a testing of her character and values [...]. Dokiia Humenna strengthened her [grasp of the] truth and came to better perception of reality" (ibid.).

Vadym Pepa writes: "For more than half a century the name of the talented Ukrainian writer was sealed by Bolshevik censorship, entirely suppressed, not everywhere, but in her homeland; she was obliterated from the memory of those who at one time knew and respected her" (Pepa 2004, 5). In these years of enforced silence, she appeared broken and devoid of any hope that she would be able to secure a place in literature: "I was so crushed that I no longer felt anything. I lost my mental or sensory receptivity. I suffered a [complete] disintegration of personality. I did not have that constant desire to grow intellectually any more: to read, observe, and accept new impressions. All that remained for me was to exist using plant/animal-like primitive instincts" (Humenna 2004, 331). However, along with these depressed feelings, she no longer "sensed fear" (ibid., 331). In her memoirs, Humenna included a note from her diary concerning the party meeting at which she was criticized and excluded from literary life, dated March 8, 1932: "At this plenary session I was assured that

in some way I am very strong. [...] To my great surprise I gained more strength. [...] The plenum acknowledged my name as an extremely black one, but still a name. This stage is now passed, finished, with a bang, spectacularly. Although I was beaten, I emerged from this defeat with the feelings of a victor” (ibid., 331).

History shaped Humenna’s life, a history in which she involuntarily had to participate. She claims at one point in her diary that her fate had already been decided a year before her birth when the Bolshevik party was formed: “At the Second Congress in London, the split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks occurred. In 1903 a program to attack the peasantry and to eliminate ‘petty bourgeois elements’ was adopted.” The narrator then describes the beginning of the October Revolution as “tightening a cord at the throat of the recent national blossoming” (Humenna 2004, 123). In this way Humenna suggests that her fate was sealed by political developments outside her control.

In the interwar years Humenna did not see the ultimate problem as lying in the Soviet system but in the quality of the people who oversaw it: “the problem lies in honesty. When the nation is honest, it will be prosperous” (Humenna 2004, 5). She goes on to say: "Where is Truth to be found? I could not reject the Ukrainian Truth – songs, language and everything that the Petliurists protected.<sup>6</sup> But the idea of world justice, elimination of exploitation of man by man, free education for all, and equality of women were attractive to me and were also the Truth. Only why were those truths fighting one another, and why could they not reconcile? International justice or national? National seemed narrower to me but dearer. [International, however,] expelled everything Ukrainian from its own home. Why? For me, this was strange and even tragic (Humenna 2004, 112-113).

Humenna then proclaims:

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<sup>6</sup> Forces loyal to Symon Petliura who came to represent the struggle for national independence in 1917-20.

By observing my life journey from the retrospective of time, I see that nothing was accidental [...]. Everything was appropriate. [...] A hard school tempered and awoke my sleeping forces. All my complaints, about being alone and having no friends ... all that was needed, so that I could learn to think independently, to nurture the inner flowering of thoughts in the grey clothes of a failure.”

This inability to adhere to “party and government!” policies caused a silence in Humenna’s literary career, while other authors who obeyed the Soviet regime had the opportunity to write and “prosper” (Humenna 2004, 504)

Humenna as an idealist and principled egalitarian argues that in fact socialism had never been present in the Soviet Union. She would have agreed with Snyder’s assertion that Stalinism was “the paradoxical attempt to resist world capitalism by imitating it” (Snyder 2014, 4). At the end of her memoirs Humenna reaches the following conclusion:

I believed that all these painful experiments on the nation are evil: distortion, revenge of a hardened upper class, which deftly mastered the situation by disguising itself as Soviet but in fact remained the same, which kicked capitalism out of the door, but then let it fly in through the window. There is no socialism-communism: there is only state capitalism. This is because humanity is a greedy predator ... I believed in the future individual who will overcome predatory instincts. I thought my task was to capture both the bright and the dark features of our days for descendants to know how hard it was to come to a better future. (Humenna 2004, 502)

Throughout her personal story, Humenna shows the broader problem of collective and cultural trauma. The function of her memoirs is the representation of individual lives as well as the cultural situations and historical moments from which they originate. According to Sidonie Smith, “narrating lives becomes an occasion for assembling and claiming identities, securing and releasing social relations and negotiating affective attachments. These acts

connect people to an intimate past, animating a historical imaginary identified with family and nation” (quoted in Rippl 2013, 5).

Dokiiia Humenna used a constant form of self-censorship to deal with the trauma of losing her place in Ukrainian literary life. Soviet manipulation of the public sphere made it hard to provide an authentic representation of life in a discredited public space. Humenna’s *Dar Evdoteii* stages individual acts of remembering the Soviet past, and, thus, participates in the construction of a collective form of memory.

## Chapter II

Collective trauma and crisis – national identity in Dokiia Humenna's novel *Khreshchatyi Iar*

“Some believed that Satan had come to earth  
in human form as a party activist,  
his collective farm register a book of hell,  
promising torment and damnation.”

Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*

Ukraine served as a battlefield between opposing totalitarian regimes during the Second World War. Because parts of its population at various times fought on different sides, it was an internally divided country. As a result, different concepts of national identity clashed within a single nation. This chapter examines the collective psyche and dynamics of identity formation during the German occupation of the Ukrainian capital, as depicted in Dokiia Humenna's novel *Khreshchatyi iar*.

### II.1. Collective memory, cultural trauma, and national identity

An understanding how national identity evolved within Ukrainian society during the Second World War can be gained from examining theoretical concepts that deal with collective memory, cultural trauma, and national identity.

Historical and collective memory serves as a foundation for national identity and as a powerful weapon in the struggle for independence. The term *mémoire collective* (collective memory) was introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s. He argues that collective memory “is not a given but rather a socially constructed notion” – one, moreover, that “requires the support of a group delimited in space and time” (Halbwachs 1992, 22). According to this author, every individual in a society within a specific social groups has distinctive memories that other members of the group have constructed over a certain period of time. Therefore, “it follows that there are as many collective memories as there are groups

and institutions in a society” (ibid., 22). Society itself does not have memory. A shared past is selectively constructed by various social groups according to current needs and knowledge. As a result, through personal and collective memories, myths, and narratives, members of a community construct an identity that helps them to survive across generations and time. They share and develop a common memory regarding their culture and historical past. Even though an individual does not have a personal experience of a subject or phenomenon, he or she can attain a comprehension of this subject or phenomenon by turning to the collective memory (Halbwachs 1980, 51). According to the sociologist, “our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present” (Halbwachs 1992, 34). Edward Said points out that “the art of memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions very much something to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain” (Said 2000, 179). This approach provides us with the insight that memory of the past is not granted and can differ among people to a great degree, especially when it comes to dealing with trauma.

Collective memory, according to Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, differs in some ways from the way historians provide information about the past. Therefore, it is important to separate the notion of collective memory from the way historians approach the past. Historians usually present the past by interpreting a “documentary record of events, but in doing so they almost always depart from private memories.” Winter and Sivan then go on to argue that “collective remembrance is a set of acts which go beyond the limits of the professionals. These acts may draw from professional history, but they do not depend on it” (Winter and Sivan 1999, 8).

Collective memory can be biased and highly selective, depending on the level of psychological pressure felt by people at a given time. Traumatizing events produce

disruptions in accustomed ways of thinking and acting, which become a cause of disorientation concerning collective identity. In order to understand all the complexities of national identity formation during wartime, it is important to focus on the phenomenon of cultural trauma. There is no doubt that culture is the symbolic belief system of a society can be affected by traumatogenic changes. The Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka asserts that “the shocks of change may reverberate in the area of affirmed values and norms, patterns and rules, expectations and roles, accepted ideas and beliefs, narrative forms and symbolic meanings, definitions of situations and frames of discourse” (Sztompka 2004, 161). As a depository of identity, heritage, and national tradition, culture is considered susceptible to traumatogenic changes. According to Sztompka, “wounds inflicted on culture are most difficult to heal. Culture obtains a particular inertia, and once the cultural equilibrium is broken, it is most difficult to restore it. Cultural traumas are enduring, lingering; they may last over several generations” (ibid.,162). Arthur Neal compares the enduring effects of a trauma in the individual’s memories with collective consciousness. In both cases, according to the scholar, “the conditions surrounding a trauma are played and replayed in consciousness through an attempt to extract some sense of coherence from a meaningless experience.” Thus, ignoring the traumatic experience is not a reasonable option, as the event that has been dismissed from consciousness “resurfaces in feelings of anxiety and despair. Just as the rape victim becomes permanently changed as a result of the trauma, the nation becomes permanently changed as a result of a trauma in the social realm” (Neal 2005, 4). Kai Erikson, in his book *Everything in its Path*, conceptualizes the difference between collective and individual trauma in the following way:

By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one’s defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively [...] By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of



communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma.” But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared [...] “We” no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body. (quoted in Alexander et al. 2004, 4)

Collective trauma always affects the identity of a society. Neal Arthur draws a connection between a collective trauma and national identity:

All collective traumas have some bearing on national identity. While in some cases national trauma results in enhancing a sense of unity within a society, there are other cases in which collective traumas have fragmenting effects [...] The social heritage provides us with an everyday blueprint and a sense of social continuity. A serious crisis of meaning surfaces when we can no longer make assumptions about the continuity of social life as it is known and understood. (Neal 2005, 29)

Cathy Caruth, one of the most influential scholars in shaping the scholarship on trauma, asserts: “Trauma is always the story of the wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language” (Caruth 1996, 4). Jeffrey C. Alexander claims that cultural trauma “occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander et al. 2004, 1).

The impact of war upon society causes fundamental changes in psychology. This kind of trauma makes society feel that it has become permanently changed and damaged. War

shatters the established structures of national identity. Moreover, the experience of war has a psychological impact on how people think about themselves and their society. It causes broken identities and values that need to be redefined and reestablished. Furthermore, all political leaders, according to Winter and Sivan, “massage the past for their own benefit, but over the last ninety years many of those in power have done more: they have massacred it” (Winter and Sivan 1999, 6). The Second World War is remembered differently in various nations: for some it is a site of national assertion or even celebration, whereas for those who experienced occupation, collaboration, and defeat war in many cases becomes the most painful page of their history. In both cases memories can be falsified, overwritten, abandoned, or displaced. This occurs because nations need to construct and reconstruct a past with which they can live in the present. The “Great Patriotic War,” as it was called within the Soviet Union, invited various interpretations from its citizens. Amir Weiner points out that “some saw the war as the Bolshevik Armageddon, a final cleansing of elements that had intruded on the desired socialist harmony, ushering in the era of communism. Others considered it a bloody sacrifice necessary to redeem the regime’s past evils. Still others viewed the war as the long-awaited death blow to an evil enterprise. But for all, the war signaled the climax in the unfolding socialist revolution, sanctioning the ever changing methods employed to reach the ultimate goal of a homogeneous and harmonious society” (Weiner 2001, 7).

Keith A. Crawford and Stuart J. Foster in their book *War, Nation, and Memory* claim: “The project of creating durable reconstructions of national, ethnic, social, and individual senses of belonging that meet new conditions but also reflect long-standing cultural attachments is particularly challenging” (Crawford and Foster 2007, 3). Thus, reestablishing one’s place in society and restructuring a national identity become necessary.

Literature has an important role to play in overcoming trauma, according to some scholars. The literary anthropologist Manfred Weinberg highlights the fact that historical and

philosophical approaches aim to blur the concept of trauma in collective memory, which makes trauma “an inaccessible truth of remembering” (quoted in Kansteiner and Weilnböck, 2008, 231). Literature, on the other hand, is capable of providing a sharper image of trauma in collective memory, by describing events in more productive and honest manner (ibid.).

Every concrete literary text, according to Renate Lachmann, serves as a “sketched-out memory space,” and “connotes the macrospace of memory that either represents a culture or appears as that culture” (Lachmann 2008, 302).

## II.2. Interrelations between collective memory, cultural trauma, and national identity in Ukraine during the Second World War

Today it is often asserted that the Second World War stands as the most destructive global conflict and demographic catastrophe in human history. Snyder has called the territory of Ukraine a part of the “bloodlands,” where “in the middle of Europe in the middle of twentieth century, the Nazi and Soviet regimes murdered some fourteen million people” (Snyder 2010, VII). Ukraine was arguably in the worst possible position, precisely because it was caught between two murderous projects. The territory of Ukraine was entirely occupied three times: first by the Soviets, then by the Germans, and afterwards by the Soviets for a second time. This chronology made the country one of the deadliest place to be during this period. According to Snyder:

In 1941 Hitler would seize Ukraine from Stalin, and attempt to realize his own colonial vision beginning with the shooting of Jews and the starvation of Soviet prisoners of war. The Stalinists colonized their own country, and the Nazis colonized occupied Soviet Ukraine: and the inhabitants of Ukraine suffered and suffered.

During the years that both Stalin and Hitler were in power, more people were killed in Ukraine than anywhere else in the bloodlands, or in Europe, or in the world. (Snyder 2010, 20)

There are many little-known and still unresolved historical traumas in Ukraine, which have become topics of research in the present day. Catherine Merridale, by analyzing the act of remembrance under Soviet rule, points out that the uniqueness of the Soviet case lies in “the silences which lay behind [...] [Second World War – S.S.], the unspoken grief for the millions – victims of other wars, and of repressions, famine, and industrial disaster – whose loss was scarcely acknowledged until the final year of Communist rule” (Merridale 1999, 62). Private practices or personal narratives of wartime are important in the gathering of oral history, a process that allows individuals to shape their knowledge of the past, while shaping, and sometimes distorting, events.

The Ukrainian participation in the war was not only the result of a conscious decision, but also something that was forced upon people by the state authority. As one historian has written: "Without their own independent state, Ukrainians had to fulfill civic obligations dictated by the countries whose citizens they were at that time. This meant that most Ukrainians had to serve in the ranks of the Soviet armed forces, and the rest of them in German, Hungarian and Romanian armies" (Vronska 1995, 2).

As opposed to collective memory (the memory of people from the same generation), cultural memory does not evolve naturally, but rather is often skillfully designed by authorities using official history as a tool. For example, Lewis A. Coser disputes the view that the tendency to reshape and repaint a collective memory in Soviet society was a common experience. He argues that state interference was of primary importance. In order to reconstruct a different set of collective memories, people were forced “to shed their own collective memory like a skin.” He points out that “all the major historical figures of the past who had been killed, slandered, vilified under Stalin’s bloody reign were now shown to have been good Bolsheviks and major revolutionary heroes.” As a result of this distorting process, today “the whole Soviet history of the last seventy years has to be rewritten” (Coser 1992,

21-22). It is therefore important to separate individual memories from politically constructed official versions of the past.

In authoritarian societies, literature, in the view of Winter and Sivan, plays a critical role in “keeping collective memory alive in a society where the writing of history was a routine operation dedicated to the glorification of the regime” (Winter and Sivan 1999, 7). In Ukrainian literature, the rethinking of trauma in relation to collective memory and national identity is still under way. The impact of the Second World War has been examined from a number of angles in Ukrainian studies. However, the research has been mainly in the area of history and based on documentary evidence, archival materials, and sometimes on official sentiments. Meanwhile, Ukrainian literature also contains a significant amount of information about the reality of war, occupation, the relationship between perpetrator and victim, and changing identities. Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* compares a person’s (auto)biography and the biography of the nation. He claims that through a complex interplay of remembering and forgetting in narratives, one recreates a person’s and a nation’s identity (Anderson 1999, 204). Nevertheless, according to Anderson, there is a central difference between narratives of person and nation. He argues that “in the secular story of the ‘person’ there is a beginning and an end. She emerges from parental genes and social circumstances onto a brief historical stage, there to play a role until her death. [...] Nations, however, have no clear identifiable birth, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural” (Anderson 1999, 205). By nation death he means genocide. Literary narratives provide numerous descriptions of drastic changes in Ukrainian society under totalitarian regimes and examples of how Ukrainians dealt with the task of preserving their national identity in a time of conflict.

### II.3. The clash of various ideologies in Dokiia Humenna's novel *Khreshchatyi Iar*

*Khreshchatyi Iar* is the first book in Ukrainian literature that describes Kyiv and its population during the Second World War. Furthermore, one of the worst Nazi shooting massacres – in Babyn Yar – was revealed in the book for the first time.

Cultural trauma, as depicted in *Khreshchatyi Iar*, is the result of an imperial conquest that shatters cultural stability and identity in Ukrainian society. The novel shows how collective recollection of history is suddenly transformed, immediately affecting the process of constructing a Ukrainian national identity. Humenna explains that in writing the novel, her main purpose was “to show step by step a complex process that took place in the soul of every single Soviet citizen during the collapse of the Soviet regime and the introduction of new unknown ideas. I tried to put that tremendous chaos into a composite frame with a small number of characters to show [...] how ways of thinking of two different worlds clashed” (quoted in Kostiuk 1983, 339).

The novel is based on a diary that she kept during the war and then she brought with her when she emigrated. Thus, the book has a clear documentary basis. Commenting on the text, a reader who had survived the occupation found the novel credible and a “priceless contribution to our literature.” This reader went on to claim: “This is the first time in my life that I have read such an unbiased, objective, truthful, sincere book about our recent past, in fact our contemporary reality. [...] This is a moment in the history of our people that cannot (and should not) be deleted; it is a work that will stand guard over the truth” (Bryn; quoted in Shkandrij 2016, 92). Many readers have noted that the novel candidly and accurately conveys the emotions, pain, and thoughts of Ukrainian people during wartime. The narrative combines the personal impressions and experiences of both the author and the members of her generation who personally experienced all the horrors of war. One critic, A. Kolomiets, has identified a prominent concern of the novel: “the fate of Ukraine, [...] and defining the place

and role of the Ukrainian people between the two totalitarian systems" (Kolomiets 2006, 7). In Pepa's view, the description of the reality of that time contributes to uncovering a truth, because in other accounts some of the events had been "highly fabricated, flipped upside down, devised to discredit the Ukrainians, who were strangled under the heel of the invader not because of their own will. [...] Ukrainian history of any period badly need the truth and only the truth" (Pepa 2004, 12).

The tone of the novel was deliberately selected. According to Humenna's note in her diary (1946), it "has to be epic-philosophical, far from the daily rush, thoughtful, surprised by what everyone finds ordinary. Terrible events that breathe the heat of political situations must be transformed, given an entirely different tone within a broad historical framework. No incitement [in the manner] of the Black Hundreds, no rabid foaming at the mouth, but a solemn bell" (quoted in Shkandrij 2015, 260).

Humenna's narrative is full of various and different details, random situations, and jokes from overheard conversations. The events take place in the real streets and squares of Kyiv, which can easily be recognized even today. Humenna uses spontaneous exclamations, dialogues, memories or thoughts (most of which were witnessed or recorded by her during war) in order not only to convey the atmosphere of occupied Kyiv but also to allow the reader to hear the voices of people who endured the occupation of their city. The critic Hryhorii Kostiuk has defined the special features of *Khreshchatyi Iar* as a "unique vision of unusual events and moods, the remarkable capture of details, deeds, spontaneous judgments of different social and cultural strata of society" (Kostiuk 1983, 338). Humenna explains why she uses the genre of what she calls the novel-chronicle by saying: "the chronicle part signifies that a novelistic form has been selected in which events follow in chronological order. It does not mean that I have agreed to provide a history. Histories are written on the basis of documents, and I did not do this" (quoted in Shkandrij 2016, 96). Nevertheless, many readers felt that she captured history accurately. One of her readers claims that "no historian

has yet presented such a truthful picture of the ‘rich’ history of the Ukrainian liberation struggle, and it surely will not be written... This is a masterpiece about our lack of leadership” (ibid., 100).

The title *Khreshchatyi Iar* refers to the name of the central street in Kyiv (Khreshchatyk). For Humenna this place is a sacred national symbol that has witnessed thousands years of evolution. She calls it the “eternaly vital artery of Kyiv, where all human rivers are gathered” (Humenna 1856, 58). Anthony Smith defines “sacred territories” as areas that “provide the scene for historic events” (Smith 1996, 589). The image of Khreshchatyi Iar acts as a symbol, a personification of historical memory. Thus, its burning and destruction during different occupations represents the ruin of the Ukrainian cultural and historical heritage, the central space or core of the nation. Khreshchatyk street acts as a mirror of the social trauma endured by an entire people: “Reality has become similar to the present Khreshchatyk. There is no wholeness; stones and bricks randomly form higher and lower piles, billions of facets of different forms in unsystematic chaos” (Humenna 1956, 256-257).

The described period was a time of sharp socio-political turmoil. Kyiv’s population, including Humenna, experienced and witnessed a major shift in ideology at the state level over a short period of time. The novel begins with a description of the Soviet retreat from Kyiv, and the frustration and confusion among ordinary people. Humenna then goes on to depict the range of emotions within the local population during the entire period of German occupation from 1941 to 1943, in particular the hope for the long-awaited independence of Ukraine, then the collapse of this hope, the implementation of a new ruthless order by the colonizer, and finally the fears associated with the return of the Soviet regime. Pohribnyi highlights the documentary value of the novel. According to this critic, the main theme of the book is “life in Kyiv during the German occupation and Mariana Veresoch’s [the main protagonist’s] ambiguous perception of three main ideologies and worldviews [...]: Fascism, Bolshevism and Nationalism” (Pohribnyi 2009, 450).



A leitmotif of the novel is the collective perception of the war's realities. Humenna tries to produce a picture of how consensus in historical understanding gradually comes about by revealing the polyphony of views in the local population, especially concerning national identity.

The main protagonist of the novel is a young writer Mariana Veresoch, Dokiia Humenna's alter ego. She represents that group of Ukrainian intellectuals who were never influenced by, or who at least remained opposed to, both Soviet and Nazi ideology. Her primary goal is to see Ukraine as an independent nation with its own authority and laws. The literary critic Ishchuk-Puzaniak describes the main protagonist as a person of "high ambitions and emotions" who nonetheless takes the more dispassionate position of an observer (Ishchuk-Puzaniak 1995, 175). Despite the instinctive fear of death, Mariana has no plans to run away from Kyiv. She does not have positive expectations of fascism, but she wants to "experience it on her own skin," without just blindly "accepting illusory messages from the Soviet Information Bureau, which is thousands of kilometers away" (Humenna 1956, 83). The narrator describes the atmosphere in Kyiv in the following way: "all around people are leaving [...] silently and don't say why [...]. They are running thousands of kilometers away from the events and call this an act of heroism and struggle." She goes on to argue: "It is stupid to flee [...] because my place is here, inside the cauldron" (ibid. 30). The decision to stay is presented as a protest against the anti-human practices of "social engineering" conducted by the Soviet regime. On the other hand, Mariana wants to share the fate of her country by being with her people during this most difficult time.

In her novel Humenna depicts how the political and military Soviet elites, most of whom are quick to leave in the first days of war, constantly, through the sophisticated use of propaganda, justify the retreat of the Soviet army and encourage the population to leave territories occupied by Germans. She records the voice of Soviet propaganda at the time as portraying anyone who found themselves under occupation in a negative light, in fact as

traitors. That voice, according to her, conveyed the following message: “All those who are here with us, are truly loyal sons of our socialist motherland (this is all said in the Russian language, of course). It is time to show in reality that we are unbreakable and hardened Bolsheviks. And we have showed it. We are ready to endure all sorts of misery, hunger and cold, but not to live under the Nazi heel. All the best are here with us. Only bourgeois scum, fascist followers, decomposed elements, and gangsters are left, all those that have always hindered our gigantic building of socialism. We do not regret that they are not with us; we have to be glad that they have removed their masks and do not clog up our monolithic close-knit ranks” (Humenna 1956, 50). The need to create an enemy and label oppositional groups as a danger to the preservation of cultural values is a fundamental part of persuading individuals as well as nations. According to Keith A. Crawford and Stuart J. Foster “stereotypes of an ‘enemy,’ military, cultural, political, and economic, are particularly authoritative in helping to promote a profound psychological awareness of a common identity, group membership, and belonging” (Crawford and Foster 2007, 2). However, a unique feature of the Soviet wartime experience was that anyone who found himself or herself behind enemy lines was either considered an enemy or suspected of anti-Soviet views. This has been documented by a number of historians, including Amir Weiner, who claims that Soviet authority legitimized the war by dividing mankind “between good sheep and dangerous goats, social and political life was propelled by evil conspiracies and cataclysmic struggles in which the liquidation of the irredeemable goats was viewed as a service to humanity” (Weiner 2001, 18).

Under conditions of national trauma, the performance of those in top positions of power is subject to close scrutiny. Society requires that leadership actions and decisions be made for the common good. In her novel, Humenna describes the crisis of Soviet authority at the beginning of war. She gives a negative evaluation of the leadership’s performance, as well as of its personal qualities. The population viewed Soviet leaders as cynically indifferent

to the troubles of those who were suffering. Mariana, the main protagonist, objectively estimates the reality of the so-called Soviet “monolithic close-knit ranks,” a phrase that is in fact only an empty slogan. It appears to promote social equality. In practice, however, these “speakers” belong to the powerful elite, are eating fancy food “in special closed dining rooms,” and living in “luxuriously furnished apartments in new buildings,” whereas the majority of society “wet [from the rain – S.S.],” wait “three hours in line [...] for wheat porridge,” and “sleep on bunks in the barracks” (ibid., 50-51). Karel C. Berkhoff in his book *Harvest of Despair* claims that as it retreated the Soviet regime “neither trusted nor cared about those citizens who were slipping from its control. From the very beginning, Stalin and his associates deceived the population about the true state of affairs at the front, committed atrocities, and pursued a scorched-earth policy. Meanwhile the local elite, unlike the general population, were in the know and had access to transportation – and started to flee east.” He goes on to say that “from the ‘Western’ perspective the Soviet authorities behaved not as a native government, but as a conqueror who had to leave” (Berkhoff 2004, 34). Lewis A. Coser asserts that for many people life under Soviet rule caused “deep personal crises.” He goes on to make a comparison: to that of two married persons suddenly discovering that both of them have a hitherto unknown disreputable past: “How they manage to deal with this sudden revelation will largely determine the future of their relationships” (Coser 1992, 22).

Humenna shows the attitudes of the population toward those who escaped the German occupation: “Those who shout that Kyiv was, and will be Soviet, left first. Furthermore, they did not just run away; they threw food products in the river, enough to last for ten years. Why not give them [the products – S.S.] to the people? Furthermore, how many rotten and spoiled products have been left in the station? Directors just throw them away, because they need their carloads to be empty [...] for furniture and pianos. But the sun is melting the butter; the meat is stinking. These [food scraps – S.S.] are probably [being left behind] for the army” (Humenna 1956, 69). Berkhoff gives Soviet elites and their actions a similar description:

“thousands of bags with flour, sugar, and salt were thrown into Dnieper [Dnipro – S.S.], and large quantities of medicine and leather vanished in the same way. Other supplies were contaminated with fuel, were poured into the streets (oil), or went down the drain (liquor). Paradoxically, many stores put up for sale items that they had not offered for years” (Berkhoff 2004, 26).

Mariana asserts that “our people do not belong to those who are running away with [...] cases full of silver [and] gold, but to those who do not leave their land, no matter what trials are ahead of them” (ibid., 83). The escape of the party *nomenklatura* (the specially privileged top layer) and industrial elite only exacerbated the complaints of Kyiv’s population against the Bolshevik system: “Communists ran away, and you, Ivan, [were transferred] to the frontline! They robbed banks and pawnshops and disappeared! They destroyed and threw everything into the Dnipro“ (Humenna 1956, 145).

After experiencing such frustration, Mariana sees with her own eyes this “grey, poor, fake, and boring Soviet reality, in which every city and town has a street named after Lenin and a square in which his monument with outstretched hand points [Soviet society the path to Communism – S.S.]; in every village there is a collective farm named after Stalin and an executive office with his posters covered with flies; every canteen has the same menu; in every factory there is a single command ‘Catch up and overtake.’ ‘Fulfill and surpass.’ The best and only salvation from such hopelessness and nausea is to be found under German bombs [namely, to stay in Kyiv under German occupation – S.S.]” (ibid., 51). She asks herself: “Is it worth living for a future like this?” Not obtaining an answer to this rhetorical question, she tries to find her way by looking in the opposite direction: “Is it better to flee to the West? At least to see for myself what are they ‘protecting’ us from?” (Humenna 1956, 51). Berkhoff describes this dilemma and the reaction of ordinary Ukrainians to the fall of the Soviet regime in similar terms. In his view, the situation was “unprecedented” in the history of Europe:

After twenty-five years of seclusion from the outside world and constant deception by the state-run media, they did not expect that under a German regime their lives would be at stake. Finally, the widespread looting during the Soviet retreat was not, as many intellectuals concluded, a sign of lack of civilization by ignorant masses, but an almost logical way to behave during the violent collapse of an economy that was nearly bereft of private property. Many Soviet citizens deemed looting necessary to avert death by starvation, but they also had a sense, in the cities as well as in the countryside, that they had a right to loot. After all, had not the Soviet authorities destroyed supplies that could have been distributed? [...] These poor and exploited people did not think they were thieves. On the contrary – they believed that they were taking back what was rightfully their. (Berkhoff 2004, 34)

The narrator of *Khreshchatyi Iar* claims that the ideas of socialism are “clear and bright for Mariana, but they have ruined themselves in practice” (Humenna 1956, 83). The theory of equality has nothing to do with communist practices. The Stalinist system, according to Mariana, was alien and even hostile to the people, because it cultivated inequality; people were exterminated by hunger. Also, Mariana states that the Bolshevik regime blocked opportunities for self-realization, and did not allow one to think independently, or to make any demands. She says: “Yesterday we thought that we were building socialism; but today it is evident even to a child that this was only a travesty of socialism; indeed it is ordinary capitalism that has been grown through socialist slogans and directives” (ibid., 213).

Echoing Humenna’s own statement in her memoirs, Mariana does not expect that fascism will bring happiness. She claims that “it is possible to ruin every ideology, even the best one, as has happened with the Soviet one. The issue is not in the system, but in the quality of those people who administer it. The problem is in their honesty” (ibid., 31). Mariana goes further to argue that it is impossible to build a society with power elites who

are “predators, bribers, crawling worms, and cunning falsifiers.” These qualities, according to her, will only lead the nation to its decay (*ibid.*, 31).

The narrator of the novel thinks that this “swinish war” was conducted at the expense of Ukraine, which “took the first hit, while the armies ran away” (Humenna 1956, 471). Stalin left the country in ruins, causing many individuals to suffer as he burned down and destroyed industry, infrastructure, and all kinds of institutions. And after all this, says the narrator, Ukraine is blamed for treason: “Now Ukrainians are called fascists! Did Stalin have the right to give away Ukraine? Wasn’t he obligated to defend it? But it seems that he threw it away [...] and then placed the whole blame on it” (*ibid.*, 471).

The Soviet experiment was, step by step, replaced by the illusion of building another utopia, one that was based on racial struggle. At first, according to Humenna, Kyiv’s population had an ambiguous attitude towards the German army. The majority of those who were left in the city imagined the new occupation regime as representing “high culture, order, and discipline” (Humenna 1956, 95), and that “chocolates, wine, canned food, and ham” would be parachuted for the Ukrainian population by the Germans (*ibid.*, 116). Historians have demonstrated the correctness of these observations. Berkhoff also depicts these first encounters in a similar tone: “hundreds of draft-age males came out of hiding, even the Khreshchatyk was filled with thousands of Kievans [Kyivites – S.S.] in festive clothes. Many women were holding bouquets of flowers, which they threw at soldiers and officers passing by. It was a rare case in history when the defeated rejoiced about the arrival of the victors” (Berkhoff 2004, 29). However, “as early as the spring of 1942, most city dwellers hated the Germans as a people at least as much as they feared them” (*ibid.*, 215). Significant numbers of people longed for the arrival of the Soviets. One of the locals said: “The Red terror was followed by the German terror; if we have to be terrorized, then let it be by people who at least understand our language” (*ibid.*, 224). According to the novel’s narrator, “What did

Hitler achieved in one year that Stalin was unable to achieve in twenty years? That we started to like Soviet rule” (Humenna 1956, 458).

On January 9, 1942 Humenna made a note in her diary: “our old friends and liberators’ export from Ukraine everything they can: furniture, [...] art, lard, sugar, etc.” The Germans, she says, took everything that was not taken or destroyed by the Bolsheviks. “They threw away [...] the property of four science research institutes (history, literature, linguistics, and archeology) of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> [...] They also “pay close attention” to our culture – any types of public associations are forbidden. The cultural and educational organization *Prosvita* and any kind of sports are prohibited.<sup>8</sup> There is no Ukrainian press, only German translated into Ukrainian” (Humenna 1942, 47). She goes on to claim: “I would not mention these facts if it was stated openly that we are an occupied country, that we have been colonized because of our territorial resources, and the only reason that we are allowed to exist is because we will be suitable for exploitation when it comes to expanding and developing those resources. This is what the truth looks like” (ibid.).

In her diary entry dated January 9, 1942, Humenna comments ironically that both Soviet and Nazi colonizers positioned themselves as “older brothers.” She states that Germans as well as their predecessors tried to spread discouragement in “our own strength, weakness and slavish obedience so as to convince us that our “older brothers” were the only hope for a better future.” The goal of German propaganda was to instill the belief that throughout history “we could not make a single step without the Germanic people. The interesting thing she says is that this idea was simply borrowed from the previous Russian “older brothers,” continually “stretched out brotherly hands” (Humenna 1942, 46).

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<sup>7</sup> The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (*Natsional'na akademiya nauk Ukrayiny*) is the highest research body in Ukraine specialized in various scientific disciplines.

<sup>8</sup> *Prosvita* ('enlightenment') is an institution created in the nineteenth century in Ukrainian Galicia for developing and preserving Ukrainian education and culture among population.

The Germans, according to Snyder, envisioned the Ukrainian lands as a colony, “where German settlers would farm fields with the assistance of their Slavic slaves” (Snyder 2014, 9). Such a project was supposed to be the opposite of the Soviet modernization plan. To accomplish it, the Germans destroyed cities and implemented a “Hunger Plan,” according to which the population needed to be reduced by thirty million. Moreover, the Germans aimed to divert the food grown in fertile regions of Ukraine to Germany (ibid., 9). Humenna describes this plan in progress: “There are no post offices, no electricity, no schools, trains do not operate. Markets are closed. Tram transit comes alive only for a short period of time... After a few months the well-ordered city has become wild. The country is partitioned into pieces” (Humenna 1956, 287). She goes on to characterize the Ukrainian experience under German regime as “colonial rule, with the perspective of degradation, destruction of major centres, conversion into provincial agrarian backwater” (ibid., 287). Snyder points out that Germans intended to destroy all educational and cultural institutions, because “the existence of a Ukrainian educated class was a barrier to German plans, but also a problem for Nazi ideology” (Snyder 2010, 131).

As many scholars have pointed out, both Soviet and Nazi regimes were characterized by “the ability to deprive groups of human beings of their right to be regarded as human” (Snyder 2012, 387). Humenna describes the cruelty of the Nazi regime by giving examples of how people were killed: “Three [...] human corpses were hanged at a real gallows right in the middle of the square [...] where people used to sell milk and cherries.” A note was attached nearby explaining the reason for the death penalty: “For listening to Soviet radio” (Humenna 1956, 371). Auxiliary Ukrainian police participated in these acts. The German occupation regime realized that if it combined its own military and administrative forces with the local police, civilian authorities, and collaborators tens of thousands people could be killed all at once. One of the protagonists describes the execution of his father:

Once, two well-bred young men came to the house on Sunday. They were polite [...]



with innocent blue eyes... it was obvious that they were raised in a good family. They humbly asked a permission to have a breakfast. Furthermore, [...] they didn't even demand anything because they had their own food. During their breakfast, there was an order for all men to gather in the square immediately. [...] The old man [The house owner] quickly left without eating. The two well-bred young people suggested to the other family members that they should bring him breakfast. [...]

[The German soldiers] ordered that every tenth man of those gathered in the square (one of them was my father) should be hanged. The Ukrainian police officers had to do this, but they shivered, their hands trembled, one fainted, another one started to cry. [...] Then, those two courteous men, with innocent blue eyes, well-bred young men, specialists of hanging [...] skillfully, professionally [...] hanged every tenth man. And their colleagues surrounded women and children [...] and forced them to watch [...] There were screams to heaven, sobbing, people lost their minds, and went grey” (Humenna 1956, 362-363)

Entire peoples were regarded as a threat to the “Aryan race,” therefore, the Nazis attempted to achieve “racial purity” through the extermination and dehumanization of some groups of people. The suffering of the population has since been documented by historians. Snyder asserts that the German invasion “depended on starvation, as the army was ordered to live from the land. In the end, starvation on such a scale proved impractical, but the Germans did kill about four million Soviet citizens by deliberate starvation” (Snyder 2014, 9). Berkhoff portrays how the Germans constantly checked an individual’s identity papers and passports, which had an entry for “nationality.” Because this revealed one’s ethnicity, “anyone identified there as Jewish now faced great danger” (Berkhoff 2004, 30). Hitler was consumed by idea that the Jews were the great enemy of the Germans, not only because they were “*racially inferior*,” but also because many ideas, political systems, philosophies, laws, and religious beliefs that invented by the Jews held Germany back. In that ideological system

everything that went wrong for Germany could be blamed on Jews. According to Snyder, the Germans killed more Jews on the territory of the Soviet Union than they had inmates in all their concentration camps. Furthermore, most Jews were killed in mass shootings: “the Germans began the mass killing of Jews in summer 1941 in the occupied Soviet Union, by gunfire over pits, far from a concentration camp system that had already been in operation for eight years” (Snyder 2012, 381-382). Pohl calculates that some 1.5 million Jews were murdered on the territory of today’s Ukraine during the war (Snyder 2014, 10). It was a time when Hitler’s vision of the world without Jews became the reality. A mechanism, process, and example of how Jews could actually be killed were put into operation. In her novel *Humenna* gives the reader a description of these cataclysmic events which changed the shape of human history:

Old and sick Jews who were just discharged from the hospital and wearing only their underwear, crawl [under the Nazi guard] along the street. They move slowly by supporting each other, with bowed heads as though at their own funeral. People stare at this miracle of European culture and civilization. Mothers pull their resisting babies. The mother is aware that this is their death path, weeps bitterly but keeps pulling. This is that independent Ukraine that the Germans here brought us.

(*Humenna* 1956, 212)

Babyn Yar, a ravine on Kyiv’s western outskirts was the site of the largest single Nazi shooting of Jews on Soviet territory. In the last two days of September more than 33,771 Jews had been slaughtered. The main protagonist of the novel describes how Jews were stripped to their underwear and led to Babyn Yar where “machine gun scattered them with bullets, sweeping them into the ravine.” After that the Germans threw grenades and the “soil covered thousands who were only wounded and perhaps still alive” (*Humenna* 1956, 195). Mariana also compares this Nazi massacre with the Soviet crime of the Holodomor: “Babyn Yar brings to mind a historical parallel. There was a time when peasants were expelled from

Ukraine, families were separated, and ten million people were put to death. Villages were extinguished in the throes of hunger. [...] Everything that is going on now is an atrocity. But what about back then? Wasn't that an atrocity as well?" (Humenna 1956, 212).

In her novel *Humenna* attempts to juxtapose the strategies of both regimes by showing their destruction of the Ukrainian society. In this too she anticipated later historians. Each totalitarian experiment had its own irreducible attributes, but Hitler and Stalin, according to Snyder, shared a certain politics of tyranny: "they brought about catastrophes, blamed the enemy of their choice, and then used the death of millions to make the case that their policies were necessary or desirable. Each of them had a transformative utopia, a group to be blamed when its realization proved impossible, and then a policy of mass murder that could be proclaimed as a kind of ersatz victory" (Snyder 2012, 388).

In emigration in the USA, Humenna's role as a writer was to represent the views of the émigré community that had come from Kyiv, but more generally from Central and Eastern Ukraine. When it appeared in 1956 *Khreshchatyi Iar* was widely discussed in the Ukrainian community in North America. It was considered extremely controversial, mainly because of author's depiction of the brand of Ukrainian nationalism, that was brought to Kyiv by newcomers, mostly members of the OUN from Europe and the Western Ukraine (Galicia, Transcarpathia, and Bukovyna), territories that had until 1939 been under Polish rule. The OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) was the radical right-wing movement based in Western Ukraine during the 1930s and during the Second World War. Humenna believed that Ukraine should be independent. In this sense she was a "nationalist." However, she saw the struggle as being for democracy and pluralism. This type of nationalism was prevalent in nineteenth – and the early twentieth – century Ukraine. In her novel she challenges the authoritarian type of nationalism promoted by the OUN's ideology and politics. In one of her letters to readers Humenna claims that her book's goal was to depict the reality of that time

and try to present “an objective view, written in Kyiv but through the eyes of the local population” (quoted in Shkandrij 2016, 95). She states the following:

One of the main purposes of my work is to show the complex process that had taken place in the souls of ordinary Soviet people, who somehow survived those twenty-three years, grew up there, and inevitably were products of Soviet moulding. These people knew nothing else; they were stuffed with daily press and radio offerings, which willy-nilly crawled into their ears. Every day they were told about “bourgeois nationalists in the emigration” and when the USSR’s collapse came, they continued to move within the sphere of the assimilated phraseology . . . An enormous change is occurring in their souls, as they gradually and painfully free themselves from the chains of Sovietism. (ibid., 95)

In her book, she highlights the fact that during the short period of time when the city was free from Soviet rule and not yet fully occupied by the Germans, many locals awaited the arrival of a Ukrainian government, about which rumors circulated at that time. However, according to the writer, the expected Ukrainian revival “limped along” (Humenna 1956, 259). One of the reasons for this was the conflict between the local population and those who had arrived from emigration. Their mental outlooks were substantially different. Moreover, the years of isolation had left their mark on Soviet citizens, who had little or no understanding of the “Europeans” or even of Western Ukrainians. Humenna describes the conflict as based on the fact that “each considered the other illiterate. Newcomers were convinced that [their mentality] had been constructed and polished in the West, and therefore they had to educate those Eastern uninformed half-witted Bolsheviks. Locals, on the other hand, claimed that they had specializations and an education and those [nationalists – S.S.] possessed only a nice

veneer with nothing inside” (ibid., 259). This polemic was continued by readers of the novel in emigration, who commented on the portrayal of nationalists.<sup>9</sup>

According to the narrator, Ukrainian nationalists show an arrogant attitude towards local citizens, and accuse them of lacking patriotism: "You do not have any initiative [...]. We [nationalists – S.S.] are revolutionaries, while all of you are influenced by Bolshevism and lack a national consciousness; you are materialists, inferior, demoralized by your Soviet background" (ibid., 258). Moreover, the Western Ukrainian or émigré arrivals often used offensive comments toward the local population, such as “You are plebs,” or “Who are you Cossacks or swineherds?” (ibid., 258). Humenna provides the example of one arrogant character, Roman Chahyr, who emigrated to the West in the 1920s and returned to Ukraine during the war. Roman refers to Ukrainian society in the following terms: “Who cut your wings [...], who made you all Little Russians (*malorosamy*)?” (Humenna 1956, 27). Little Russia was the term used to describe Ukraine under Russian imperial rule. It signified a regional or cultural identity that was loyal to imperial rule and made no political demands. Already in the 1920s it was used by Ukrainian writers to describe cowards or turncoats among their own people.

In response, locals consider nationalists to be “Ukrainian fascists” (ibid., 168). The narrator depicts the disappointment with “Westerners” as voiced by Kyivites: “They considered themselves very smart! However, they just came on the heels of the Germans, which is not a great achievement. And they claim to be the leaders of a grey plebeian mass of indigenous swineherds. They are snobs who have simply learned a few formulas and imagine themselves as the gods of Ukrainian affairs. They formed in advance the opinion that no one knows anything except themselves. So what is the difference between them and the fascists if their reason for coming is to govern? Locals cannot express their point of view, because it is

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<sup>9</sup> The conflict is analyzed by Shkandrij in his article “Dokiiia Humenna’s Depiction of the Second World War and the OUN in *Khreshchatyi iar*: How Readers Responded” (2016).

automatically considered as backward, influenced by Bolshevism, and ignorance” (ibid., 258). According to the author, Kyiv’s population was waiting for new fresh forces from abroad, but not superiors whose purpose was to establish an authoritarian order. The conflict was a painful one. Most ordinary local people, according to Berkhoff, did not believe in political ideologies:

Their ethnic identity and political loyalties were vague to a degree that was very irritating, if not intolerable, for those with a clear weltanschauung – the Ukrainian nationalists and the Communists. Ordinary people never spelled out whether in saying “our people” they were including or excluding Communists and Galician Ukrainians. But it is clear that few of them considered Soviet rule a “Russian” project. Although most natives could imagine the formation of a Ukrainian administration, they did not find an independent Ukrainian state necessary. All of this was frustrating for Ukrainian nationalists. The native population was also, from a Communist point of view, insufficiently Soviet. [...] They expected some involvement in the political process and some respect. They were also sovietized in the sense that they disbelieved many of the things visitors told them about life in “Europe.” At the same time, however, and more important, they believed little of the Communist ideology” (Berkhoff 2004, 230).

One reader has commented that “the uncompromising reality depicted by the writer attracts the reader’s attention. Dokiia Humenna did not want to romanticize a difficult situation.” She shows that eventually the German command appeared, and that it was afraid of a Ukrainian national revival no less than of Bolshevism. This reader indicates that “there was a lot of confusion between Ukrainians, who had been in various political systems for twenty years, both among “Soviets” and those who had returned from emigration” (Melnyk 1993, 114).

Later in emigration, in her response to another reader, Humenna pointed out that these painful events cannot be erased from the nation's consciousness and collective memory. Therefore, they have to be analyzed and understood, so that citizens of a single state, but with various historical backgrounds, would be able to approach each other with full awareness of those differences and in order to build a common Ukrainian future:

The words of my characters [...] are not my words, but those of typical individuals in Kyiv at that time. I am not able to force them to speak another language, one desirable to nationalist romantics, a language of propaganda, because this would be a falsification of reality, and I tried to present this reality as truthfully as possible . . .

My main idea was that there existed various ideological tendencies in living Ukrainian reality and that we all need to search for a common Ukrainian path.

(quoted in Shkandrij 2016, 97).

#### II.4. Crisis of identity within shifting ideologies

In her novel *Khreshchatyi Iar*, Humenna depicts characters who are the victims of dilemmas common to colonized people and which lead them towards alienation and a crisis of identity.

The emergence of collective violence had disturbing consequences for the moral consciousness of society. Tarnavskyi states that Humenna depicted Ukrainian society in a truthful way. He argues that Ukrainian people “survived genocide [Holodomor], experienced the mass executions and repressions of the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the whole conscious element of the Ukrainian nation by the enemy [Soviet authority]. Therefore, during the uncertain time of the war they cannot become active in defence of their country and themselves” (Tarnavskyi 1999, 181).

Humenna portrays Mariana as an introvert who observes people's behaviour during extreme situations and constantly thinks about nation-building problems. Humenna also depicts popular sentiments toward Soviet apologists, Germans, nationalists and Jews. Her

alter ego in the novel constantly worries that there is a shortage of selfless people who choose the happiness and prosperity of the nation over personal profit. The narrator divides people into three categories: those who are running away, those who are quickly changing their masks and are ready to glorify the new regime, and those newcomers who, after arriving from Western Ukraine and Central Europe, are attempting to create political and literary organizations in Kyiv. She claims that none of these characters are able to meet the needs of the Ukrainian population.

Opportunism, according to Humenna, is the most common phenomenon in occupied Kyiv. It reflects the fundamental model of Sovietization: the adoption of a political system, way of life, and mentality modeled throughout the Soviet Union. It is the result not only of the necessity for biological survival, but also of the human desire to get some new privileges or retain existing ones, such as housing or salaries.

Reinhardt, a Russian theatre actor, is an example of such a multifaceted orientation. With the appearance of Ukrainian nationalists in Kyiv, whose arrival accompanied that of the German armies, he hangs a sign "Ukrainian artist lives here" on his door. It is written in illiterate Ukrainian. Although Reinhardt speaks Russian and admits that he is a Russian "in spirit," and that he "loves Russia," he tries to show his "Ukrainianness" by saying: "I love Ukrainian songs and fat back [salo – a Ukrainian delicacy]" (Humenna 1956, 232-233). There is a symbolic meaning in the fact that Reinhardt remains in Kyiv. Nationally oriented young forces were too weak to hold in their hands all functions of the state, while "old-regime monarchists" like Reinhardt, with their nostalgia for the "good pre-revolutionary" times remained and continued to pull Ukraine towards the past. Another example of opportunism is displayed by the poet Shchuka, who writes an ode to Hitler when the Nazis occupy Kyiv. By doing so, he wants to ingratiate himself with the new authorities. Humenna argues that these types of people with opportunistic double standards represent the "mud, from which Ukraine cannot pull her legs in order to step into the future" (ibid., 233).



Another character with shifting views is Halyna Poltavchenko. She constantly adjusts her identity to the ruling authority. At first, she collects gossip, rumours, all kinds of news to understand what will happen to Kyiv and the local population. Devoid of the ability to think critically, she believes in stories about German precision, neatness, and racial purity. She looks forward to meeting a new government. After Halyna has read a note that all Ukrainians have free admission to theatres, she starts to identify herself as Ukrainian. When Ukrainian nationalists come to Kyiv, she hears gossip that all Russians will be expelled from the city. Therefore, she starts speaking only Ukrainian: “My mother is Ukrainian, my dad is Ukrainian, I love Ukraine [...] I always felt like a Ukrainian...” (ibid., 196). She even starts to dress well, because she hears the opinion that “the West evaluates people by their clothes” (ibid., 197). Apparently, these changes help her to get a job as a secretary in one of the nationalist institutions (ibid., 204). Because “she was the most appropriate candidate amongst this Asiatic unformed mass” (ibid., 202). The young nationalist woman, whom Humenna does not name, but according to her diary was Olena Teliha, conducts a job interview, in which she says: “I left Ukraine when I was a child. Kyiv has always been a holy place for me [...], but I was disappointed when I arrived, as my dream place was covered by greyness [...] The streets are full of garbage and the grey public does not even know how to properly wear clothes. There are no hats, only squalid worn kerchiefs and vatianky”<sup>10</sup> (ibid., 197). The decision to offer Halyna a position was based on her appearance and her answer to the question “Does she likes Pushkin?” To which she replied: “No, I cannot stand Russian literature” (ibid., 204). However, it is not surprising that later, when everything Ukrainian becomes dangerous again, she quickly adopts an anti-Ukrainian identity. Halyna moves to Berlin and becomes a “pure-blooded” German citizen by fabricating documents that her grandmother was German (ibid., 383). According to Shkandrij, who has analyzed Humenna’s

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<sup>10</sup> “Vatianka” or “vatnyk” is a cheap cotton-padded jacket. It has connotations of ugliness and formlessness. The word “vatnyk” is a slang neologism widely used by Ukrainians in reference to individuals with pro-Russian, chauvinist views.

responses to readers' comments on the novel, the description of Halyna's storyline is not fictional. In one of the letters cited in the article, Humenna mentions Iryna Rohalska, who was Olena Teliha's personal secretary. She describes her in the following way: "I met her once and she began to brag that she had 'an uncle in Leipzig' and that she was already a Volksdeutsche, because her grandmother had been German. I asked: 'Why aren't you speaking Ukrainian?' [...] Her answer: 'It is dangerous now'" (quoted in Shkandrij 2016, 94).

Olena Teliha was a Ukrainian writer who in 1923, after the Bolsheviks established their rule, fled to Europe. Later she became an OUN member and in 1941 along with the German administration returned to Kyiv. Her disappointment and encounter with the Ukrainian reality that was influenced by Soviet rule is famously described in one of her poems: "Everything awaits us: despair and insults, and our native land will be foreign to us" (quoted in Shkandrij 2015, 178). Under German occupation she was a head of the hastily created Ukrainian Writers' Union, a founder and editor of the weekly journal *Litavry*, and she also cooperated with a newspaper *Ukrainske slovo*. In her diary Humenna describes her relationships with nationalists in general and Teliha in particular as a highly unpleasant experience.<sup>11</sup> She blames nationalist (meaning pro-OUN) writers, and Teliha in particular, for their arrogance and aristocratic behaviour. This attitude toward Teliha was formed when Humenna came to the Writer's Union in December 1941. Later, after the meeting with Teliha she made the following note in her diary: "'Mrs. Olena' was fussing and running around; she was trying to get rid of me by kicking me off her office. She did not like me, but I did not suspect it at that time. I continued to follow her [...]. I thought it might be interesting for two writers who were brought up in different worlds but have the same love for their home country, to meet and talk. However, a 'noblewoman' did not have the same desire. [...]. When

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<sup>11</sup> Diary – copybook eight September 1941- February 1942 (pp. 1-59) is located in Humenna's archive in the UVAN (Ukrainska Vilna Academia Nauk – Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences) in New York.

she eventually became tired of pretending that she was interested, using that Western-European aristocratic manner, she said ‘I am asking you to please leave, because we have a meeting here... so please’” (Humenna 1941-42, 36). Humenna was so frustrated after such a behaviour, that she asked herself: “What kind of writers’ union is it when a writer is not allowed to participate in meetings? What kinds of intrigues take place at those gatherings?” She goes on to say: “It was only later I found out that the union was organized not to protect writers’ rights but to serve as a ‘moral support’” for certain people. This took the form of money. The head of the union received four thousand, a vice-head – three thousand, and a secretary – two thousand (ibid.). Humenna wrote: “I don’t quite get the fascists principles of engineering civic life, but my logic says that the concept of a union means equality, otherwise there is no need to organize one. The person can simply open a firm using one’s own money and invite only those people who match one’s taste. It is not a democracy it’s authoritarianism” (ibid.).

Humenna in her diary entry dated December 24, 1941 calls nationalists “adventurers with a thirst for power and money,” who disguise this with their high ideology, elegant appearance, and regal manners. She claims: “I was surprised by their lack of interest in people (“leftovers”) that remained [in Kyiv] as I did [...]. They haughtily evaluated my works as primitive. Nationalists were of the opinion that “the most prominent Soviet writers” fled to the East. Therefore, those who were left had to be considered mediocre. Those people [nationalists – S. S.] only value everything that already has been established as of the “highest rank/quality,” using previously provided [Soviet] estimates.” She goes on to claim: “I don’t belong to “aristocrats by blood.” I cannot approach their field of activity. [They are] ambitious and arrogant. [...] They locked themselves in a circle of ‘specially selected’ and ‘higher’ individuals. And I, in their opinion, belong to the plebeians and mob” (ibid., 35).

A few days afterwards, on December 31, 1941, Humenna wrote down that Teliha along with some other émigré writers had come to Kyiv as members of the "superior race."

She noted: “I do not despise them as people, but their inappropriate arrogance is completely alien to me. They do not sound like a creative group, but namely as flashy on the surface. This is naturally alien to me, and I will never accept it. I prefer loneliness and non-recognition” (ibid., 42). Even though Humenna expressed anger and disappointment in her diary, she tended to blame herself as well: “I’m not just accusing others and considering myself sinless. The important thing is that I blame myself for everything” (ibid., 40). It should be noted that in February 1942 Teliha was arrested by the Gestapo and executed in Babyn Yar. This fact explains Humenna’s later feeling of guilt and regret, and why she probably avoided mentioning Teliha’s name in her novel, which was written a decade later after the described events.

The narrator of *Khreshchatyi Iar* depicts Mariana’s national identification during the conflict with Vasanta Chahyr, a member of the Communist Party who is later killed by the Gestapo. Mariana thinks that Vasanta has become trapped in “old systems and cannot clearly see through them.” She goes on to argue that “life has forced even Stalin to rethink recent schemes. Yesterday we thought that we were building socialism, but today it is clear even to a child that this is only a parody of socialism; in fact, it is ordinary capitalism that has grown through the use of socialist slogans and decrees. Yesterday we learnt that national feelings were primitive for a socially mature person, and today life shows us that the desire of a nation to manifestation itself is not a toy...but a dynamic force” (Humenna 1956, 213). Vasanta feels angry when Ukrainian nationalists start becoming active in Kyiv. She considers their actions to be a manifestation of “fake antediluvian Ukraine” and “a puppet comedy staged by the Nazis” (ibid., 208-209). Vasanta proclaims: “I do not accept anything that came from Hitler. And I am disgusted by everything that came along with him” (ibid., 213). Although Mariana agrees with Vasanta that nationalists do not realize the complexity of Ukrainian reality, she does not condemn their personal ambitions, idealism, and dedication. She says: “It does not matter what the representations of Ukrainian identity are. Maybe they are

antediluvian, but they are ours; we have to support them, provide the ground for our roots to grow. We must work for Ukraine as she is. She may be archaic, challenged, weak, under alien influences, but she is ours!" (ibid., 209-210). Mariana goes on to say that "perhaps, our yellow-blue flag looks anemic in comparison with the red one of the Bolsheviks and the red of the fascists. But it is our" (ibid., 211).

Through the dialogue between Mariana and Vasanta, Humenna conveys the idea that both regimes, Nazi and Soviet, committed horrible crimes against the Ukrainian people. However, the German occupation appears to obliterate for some people the memory of Soviet terror and collectivization. During her conversation with Vasanta, Mariana questions her friend's ability to recognize the scale of atrocities committed by the Soviets: "Why aren't you hurt by the fact that our moms with their children were forced to walk four hundred kilometers in winter in the woods without any trails in the Arkhangelsk region? People lived and slept for a week in that forest when there was a severe frost [...] Children died first... But I see you do not feel sorry for them... Why such a belated humanism? Is it because the Soviets did all these things immured from the outer world, and these [Nazis] are doing it publicly? Why don't you recognize all of the atrocities, and are only sensitive to one of them?" (Humenna 1956, 212). Soviet reality as described by Humenna through the monologue of her main protagonist was not an invention of the author. Lynne Viola in her work *Stalin's Empire* focuses on forced labour in the Gulag. She describes the same period of time and the same territory, based on testimonies and historical facts. According to the scholar, exiles begun their trek "on foot, covering a distance of 20-50 kilometers a day, over as many as eight to twenty-five days. They were beaten and robbed along the way, only to arrive in the midst of desolate, uninhabited tundra where their first task would be to build accommodations for their families. 'Each day we expect death,' one young man wrote home. Another wrote to his family, 'no matter what, don't come. We are dying here. Better to hide, better to die there, but no matter what, don't come here'" (Viola 2014, 32). Viola reveals

another testimony from a Gulag victim, in which the prisoner mentions how people were starved to death: “We were weak...People began to swell and die. [Soviet commanders] buried them without coffins, in collective graves, which grew every day” (Viola 2014, 32).

Although Mariana is ready to devote herself entirely to the nation-building process, she cannot find the strength to cooperate with nationalists during the German occupation. She chooses neutrality instead. Lavrinenko characterized such non-interference as a representation of the cognitive dissonance and passive resistance of the local population, which did not have a chance during Soviet times to prepare an active position (quoted in Tarnavskyi 1999, 181). Humenna is particularly sensitive to these realities as seen from the bottom up, namely, the way ordinary people respond to the efforts being made by Ukrainian nationalists to change cultural values and to impose their own ideas. The narrator, like her protagonist Mariana, envisions her nation as a distinctive part of a world community, but also as part of a single humanity and a moral unity. Her critique of nationalism resembles that of Anthony Smith, who argues that nationalism, on the other hand, “offers a narrow, conflict-laden legitimation for political community, which inevitably pits culture-communities against each other and, given the sheer number and variety of cultural differences, can only drag humanity into a political Charybdis” (Smith 1991, 18).<sup>12</sup>

After the German retreat in 1943, when Kyiv was expected to be retaken by the Red Army, Mariana decides to go to the West. She explains this decision by saying: “it is better to be unfairly blackened as a ‘fascist traitor’ [...] than to swallow and choke on the chewing gum of Soviet kitchens” (Humenna 1956, 484). Mariana realizes that “self-preservation is an everlasting compromise with the reality that the soul does not accept” (ibid., 419). She tries to free herself from the role of victim, exclaiming: “no more compromises! There is no time to wait, and postpone everything for a better time. All life is a bad time, but you have to do

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<sup>12</sup> A sea monster in Greek mythology that was later depicted as a whirlpool

what is right for you, not what compromise forces you to do” (ibid., 420). She finds joy and a reason for existence in literature and in the ability to write.

There is no doubt that through Mariana’s voice Humenna is explaining her personal decision to emigrate. She fears the return of mass executions and repressions of Ukrainian culture. According to Kostiuk:

Dokiia Humenna remained in Kyiv even when communist leaders escaped, and German invaders came instead. This period was a turning point in her biography. Although she did not know what the plans of the new "liberators" were, she did not have any illusions, or hopes for a better future. She thoroughly observed the lives of Ukrainian people under German occupation, wrote down facts, characters, and all kinds of situations – large, small, heroic and criminal [...] that a few years after became the plot of *Khreshchatyi Iar*. Dokiia Humenna never cooperated with the Germans[...]. However, she did not want to return to the censorship and surveillance of the NKVD [People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs in the Soviet Union]. Therefore, [...] in the fall of 1943 along with hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian people she departed to the West" (Kostiuk 1983, 325).

For Humenna emigration was not just an escape from Nazi or Soviet execution, but an attempt to overcome the trauma of the totalitarian experience and to preserve her identity. She felt unneeded in her own country under the rule of what she considered an occupation force: “How to transmit that pulse of a fatal era that we have not yet grasped? We live in a terrible and tragic time, and we do not fully understand how we were drawn into this difficult life full of troubles and hidden danger. And all this leads to a single thought – we are not needed. They [the colonizers] sweep us aside brutally” (Humenna 1956, 326). Humenna cannot remain emotionally detached when the Ukrainian social fabric is under attack. She is convinced that the best contribution she can make is to leave her testimony to the next generation.

Humenna argues that the Ukrainian identity should not be seen as a product of recent historical events. According to Shkandrij, she believed that the nation is an outcome of “several thousand years of evolution, over which time many waves of migration have interacted“ (Shkandrij 2016, 90).

The narrator reaches the conclusion that an optimistic future for Ukrainian society will only be possible if national identity is based on a historical awareness and a sense of autonomous development. She claims that this sense of separate and unique identity, over the millennia of its existence and under different names, was “rooted in the land, now called Ukraine [...] It finally wants to spread its powerful wings and prove that it can grow to maturity under the Ukrainian sun, without uninvited ‘guardians’” (Humenna 1956, 371). By using these metaphors, Humenna tries to convey the idea that history shows that the desire of Ukrainians to take its place on the world map is deserved. The ideal model of the universe Mariana envisions is a “galaxy of nations, a constellation in which each has its own radiance” (ibid., 343). The narrator develops this idea in the following way: “There are always “theirs” and “ours”. The world has divided, crumbled, split. People invent novelties and new systems to find wholeness, but the abyss of splitting and fragmentation grows ever more. The effort is pointless; every system is always being amended by reality and becomes the opposite of what was desired” (Humenna 1956, 339). She asks a rhetorical question: “Is there a city with a single nationality?” and gives an answer “No, there is not. A world culture does not allow this. Ideas created in the depths of one nation are adopted by other states that develop them for the purpose of great accomplishments and as the basis of future ideas. All world ideas intersect and originate something new” (ibid., 339). Humenna’s vision of national identity can be described as the product of interaction by many cultures during many years of evolution. She tries to prove this idea by presenting the worship of the sacred bull, which was a common practice for European cultures, including the Ukrainian culture. The narrator asserts: “an analysis of the word [bull], as well as the names of different nations, places, and



rivers, show that the bull cult was widespread all over Europe. Therefore, we all originate from a single cradle – those Germans who drive tanks through corpses, and these Kyiv citizens who are digging trenches. Their ancestors had a single totem. Why is one people higher and another lower?” (ibid., 101). On January 9, 1942, at one point in her diary Humenna ponders the idea that the traditions of European nations originated from a single cradle in prehistoric times. She tried to prove this argument by providing a common etymology of some Ukrainian and German words: “We have the word *tsybulia* (onion), whereas Germans use *tsvibel* [*zwiebel* in German]. We have the word *tlumachyty* (to interpret), and they have *dolmecheryty* [*dolmetscher*]. Neither has borrowed anything from the other. European nations originated from a single core because they all cultivated similar traditions. The fact that one state has developed more rapidly than the other does not demonstrate a primordial difference between them, but only the accomplishments of a later generation (Humenna 1941-42, 47).

Homi Bhabha in his work *The Location of Culture* calls this phenomenon the hybridity of cultures. He claims that hybridity refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena. Therefore, identities, whether they are individual or collective, are always in process of formation out of different elements (Bhabha 1994, 37). In a similar manner the narrator of *Khreshchatyi Iar* ponders the idea of “pure” and “higher” race, claiming that there are no fixed and clear-cut ethnic communities, where kinship, culture, and identity are homogeneous and fully overlapping: “Where can there be [a pure race]? Maybe somewhere on a small island with savage inhabitants. Races were interwoven during several stages [of evolution] that cause the appearance of nations, modern nations. In order to learn and understand the spirit of a nation, one has to trace those interweavings that have made it” (Humenna 1956, 101).

Edward Said in his work *Culture and Imperialism* makes similar points. He asserts that “neither culture nor imperialism is inert, and so the connections between them as

historical experiences are dynamic and complex.” He goes on to argue that “cultural forms are hybrid, mixed, impure, and the time has come in cultural analysis to reconnect their analysis with their actuality” (Said 1993, 14).

A number of scholars have argued that the nation-building process requires an understanding of cultural differences based on a broader and more inclusive vision of political community. Roxanne Doty states that “national identity is never a finished product; it is always in the process of being constructed and reconstructed” (quoted in Smith G. 1998, 3). Humenna tries to show something similar in her novels, in which different cultural traditions give rise to various forms and types of identities. Her works anticipate the view of scholars like Herzfeld who argues: “National culture is the resulting mosaic of competing nationalist ideologies based on different interpretations of the cultural base of the nation” (Herzfeld 1982). Humenna’s *Khreshchatyi Yar* shows that although each Ukrainian had a different level and kind of national consciousness, the war was traumatic for everyone, in social, cultural, and existential terms. One of the novel’s protagonists claims: “we are all victims, those who are fighting, and those who are keeping themselves in a safe corner” (Humenna 1956, 296).

Humenna’s novel shows how people with first-hand experience of traumatic events during wartime construct and express their sense of national belonging. The author models her characters on various incidents and crises in her own life. *Khreshchatyi iar* offers sketches of personal stories in the light of occupation and colonization. According to Kostiuk, her novel is "full of the ideological and unprincipled, the conscious and unconscious, the brave and cowardly, the honest and dishonest, the kind and predatory, looters and spiritually broken people. All of these people, mainly against their own will, found themselves in limit situations, and each in their own way and according to their own understanding, searched for a place and way to endure" (Kostiuk 1983, 342).

*Khreshchatyi Iar* shows the importance of cultural memory as the novel strives to recall and process the experience of living through decades in a totalitarian society. Moreover, the book provides an understanding of how Ukrainians viewed their social responsibility during the war, as well as the way they dealt with their emotions. The novel presents different models of trauma associated with totalitarian regimes and their abuse of human freedom.

Humenna's narratives about the colonial period strive to participate in the nation-building effort by producing a representation of the Ukrainian reality as a way to contribute to the Ukrainian national imagery. Her novel presents itself as a tortured exploration of the autobiographical self at the intersections of national identity and individual psyche. It attempts to integrate multiple viewpoints into a complex picture of wartime experience. The depiction of life in all its complexity and the illustration of a local population with different conceptions of national identity serve as a necessary step towards understanding Ukrainian realities during the war period.

### Chapter III

Representation of national identity through the prehistoric past:

two novels *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie* (The Past Flows into the Future, 1978)

and *Velyke Tsabe* (The Great Tsabe, 1952)

The past is simply a social construction shaped by concerns of the present.

Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory*

Who controls the past controls the future.

Who controls the present controls the past.

George Orwell, 1984

In examining two novels by Dokiia Humenna, *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie* (The Past Flows into the Future, 1978) and *Velyke Tsabe* (The Great Tsabe, 1952), this chapter will focus specifically on Humenna's vision of Ukrainian national identity's roots in a prehistoric past. These two novels serve as a compendium of knowledge about the Trypillian culture that flourished from the fifth to third millennium BC in the land that is present-day Ukraine. Humenna traces the genesis and trajectory through time of the matriarchal myth that is associated with this culture, a myth that is still popular in contemporary Ukraine. She also tries to establish and explain the spiritual connection of contemporaries with this prehistorical past – one that affirms her people's right to an appropriate place in the present and future.

#### III.1. Myth-making as a response to trauma

The twentieth century with its countless traumas permanently changed the entire fabric of the Ukrainian nation. Scholars have indicated that under extreme conditions, restoring a sense of order becomes a required societal response to traumatic experience. For a

nation it is important to find a new “sacred” meaning that can replace chaos and crises. Traumatic experience obliges people to reconstitute peaceful memories not only from their lives, but also from other eras and generations. Maurice Halbwachs explores this idea in his work *On Collective Memory*, where he states: “We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated” (Halbwachs 1992, 47). He goes on to argue: “We are free to choose from the past the period into which we wish to immerse ourselves. [...] Whereas in our present society we occupy a definite position and are subject to the constraints that go with it, memory gives us the illusion of living in the midst of groups which do not imprison us, which impose themselves on us only so far and so long as we accept them” (ibid., 50).

Scholars argue that the same mechanism is employed by larger collectives. Myths serve as a form of social glue that ties a fragmented community together into a shared form of belonging. Arthur G. Neal, in his work *National Trauma and Collective Memory*, argues that “while the responses of individuals to national traumas are highly varied, collective responses tend to become standardized through the elaboration of myth and legends for defining the moral boundaries of society” (Neal 2005, 20). In turn, Anthony Smith describes myths as “widely believed tales told in dramatic form, referring to past events but serving present purposes and/or future goals” (Smith 1991, 19).

A stateless society that wants to be recognized as an independent nation often looks for its deep roots in history. Whenever there is a discussion around identity formation over a long period of time, scholars and writers often refer to a myth of common kinship or descent shared by nations and ethnic groups. Myths and the narratives of legendary events that unfold in a distant past, have a unifying function that is valuable for cultural memory and that offers a glorious future similar to its heroic past. In both scholarly and colloquial discourse, according to Gat, myth “often implies falsehood, but more discriminately it means a

legendary communal story or tradition about great past events, which may have a greater or lesser base in reality” (Gat 2013, 37). He goes on to argue that the importance of the myth of common descent or kinship is “precisely that peoples throughout history have been so prone to generate it as a supreme bond. When different communities fused together, they tended to create an often fictitious genealogy of common ancestry and descent. People everywhere have been strongly inclined to extend the images and idioms of kinship over those with whom they shared cultural identity, territory, and political community, and not only metaphorically” (ibid., 38). Smith claims that the primary function of national identity is “to provide a strong ‘community of history and destiny’ to save people from personal oblivion and restore collective faith” (Smith 1991, 161).

Recorded history provides us with various sources (formal documents, photographs etc.) that help to acquire knowledge about certain events. Oral history, on the other hand, tries to transmit collective memories from one generation to the next through the myth-making process. Neal highlights the idea that before the invention of the printing press, oral history was the only possible way of passing on group experiences and a collective heritage: “Stories were told about heroic times and the moral foundations of society. Some degree of social continuity was provided by oral traditions in which narratives were often embellished in order to have more dramatic effects on listeners. New generations were provided with frames of reference for deciding what to do, or what not to do, in given situations. Then as now, mythical accounts provided the ingredients for shaping a collective identity” (Neal 2005, 198). Consequently, individual as well as group memory contains invented and reinvented myths, exaggeration, and certain level of false perception. According to Keith A. Crawford and Stuart J. Foster, it “moves beyond the personal remembrances of individuals to embrace a “true” and authentic narrative of the past socially constructed through the uniting of numerous personal and group accounts into a familiar and coherent tale that becomes an accepted orthodoxy” (Crawford and Foster 2007, 4-5). For example, Edward C. Whitmont, in

his book *Return of the Goddess*, raises the issue of archetypes and how they evolve in a particular culture. He argues that: “The integrity of an individual life, no less than that of the collective life that is culture, depends upon [its] myths. Their archetypal themes give form and meaning” (Whitmont 1982, 28). Following a similar argument, Cynthia Eller states that “the myth of matriarchal prehistory speaks to what seems to be an extremely common human need to trace the origin of important, and sometimes controversial, social institutions” (Eller 2000, 30). The anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in the 1920s brought forward the idea of myth as “charter.” According to him, myth can be considered a “collection of narratives that dictate beliefs, define ritual” and which therefore act “as the chart of their social order and the pattern of their moral behaviour” (quoted in Eller 2000, 176). Vladimir Propp, a Soviet scholar and folklorist, compares myths and folktales. He claims that even though there are some similarities in plots, composition, and motifs, these two genres cannot be considered the same: “a myth is a sacred story that people believe to be true, whereas a folktale is a tale that is not presented as reality” (Harrison 2016, 128). Moreover, he outlines the fact that whenever myth loses its social significance, it becomes a folktale (ibid., 127). Propp points out that the plots of folktales take roots in myths of the past: “Primitive people did not have fairytales. They had only myths. Individual motifs, episodes, or events may reflect ancient concepts that existed before the creation of the folktale. The folktale did not yet exist, but those concepts, those images, those fantastic or real events that it tells about, could have had a place in formations that preceded the folktale or even in reality” (ibid., 128). He goes on to argue that “it is precisely in the deep past that the people’s moral face took shape. Anyone who wants to understand his own people must understand that people’s past” (ibid., 129). For the same reason Humenna was interested in prehistoric society and culture of modern Ukraine.

Myths that invite speculation about female centrality and matriarchal empowerment, have in modern times become a visible constituent of Ukrainian cultural memory. Marian J

Rubchak makes an assumption that “matriarchal myth lives on to excite the Ukrainian imagination. It displays astonishing vigor and resiliency in its ability to survive and adapt to the vagaries of Ukraine’s historical fortunes, and to generate important discursive issues as the nation’s people seek to create and shape the world in which they live” (Rubchak 2009, 139).

Lev Sylenko, who is well known as the founder of present-day Ukrainian paganism, in particular as a founder of the RUNVira group,<sup>13</sup> has articulated this view that a “true Ukrainian identity could be built on the basis of pre-Christian ancestral traditions” (quoted in Lesiv 2013, 5). These ideas have never been part of the mainstream national discourse, but they have attracted interest.

The realities of socio-political life and resistance to colonial oppression became the main triggers in Humenna’s search for an alternative interpretation of national identity. She attempts to establish the antiquity of her nation by tracing the survival of prehistoric cultural practices. Maurice Halbwachs argues that the process of reproducing the past by using “contemplative memory” or “dreamlike memory” helps us to deal with turbulence. He claims that “it is one of the rare moments when we succeed in isolating ourselves completely [...] If we flee in this way from the society of the people of today, this is in order to find ourselves among other human beings and in another human milieu, since our past is inhabited by the figures of those we used to know. In this sense, one can escape from a society only by opposing to it another society” (Halbwachs 1992, 49). To accommodate itself to, or to resist totalitarian rule, a society is sometimes willing to reconstruct the frameworks of its memory: “by going back to past generations, an ancestor or a deed generating nobility can be found. If it didn’t exist one could wholly invent it” (ibid., 134). The prehistoric past was Humenna’s

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<sup>13</sup> RUNVira – *Tserkva Virnyh Ridnoyi Ukrayinskoyi Natsional'noyi Viry* (Church of Faithful of Native Ukrainian National Faith) was founded in North America in 1966 as an attempt to revive pre-Christian Slavic neopaganism. It promotes worship of the ancient deity "Dazhboh" (Sungod). RUNVira proclaims that every nation should have its own faith.



response to oppression by Soviet authorities: “They pushed me out from the reality which I did not want to accept and fit into. Therefore, I started to create my own world, my own existence” (Humenna 2004, 489). She calls this state “self-suggestion” and “self-hypnosis,” one that gave her the strength to “go against the tide.” She describes this in the following way: “the reality, along with my inability to adapt to it, exterminated my recent outer world. In this way a peculiar shield/protection started to grow, to generate an inner atmosphere in which I was able to breathe. With this defensive shield I expanded my world with the help of outdated [prehistoric – S.S.] themes. [...] I am willing to live in other epochs and spaces” (ibid., 489).

### III.2. Ukraine’s pre-Christian identity: *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie* (1976)

Humenna was interested in ancient cultures from an early age. However, during the pause in her literary career, when Soviet repression prevented her from working as a writer in the 1930s, she started to search for another role to play in society and turned to the study of archaeology. She describes this difficult time in her memoirs in the following words: “How many jobs I have tried and none fit me, each of them was like a prison, each interfered with doing what I was born for [...] I felt that I was a stranger to this world. This was not my place. But where to go? Either to the past, or to the future, but not to remain here [in the present]” (Humenna 2004, 444).

Humenna started to read a lot of literature about prehistoric peoples, and as a result she realized that she had finally “sailed to her own shore” (Humenna 2004, 444). In one of her letters, she describes a plan for a science-fiction movie in which she introduces the audience to the civilizations that have existed in Ukraine over several millennia. “I think,” she says, “this movie will increase the awareness of all Ukrainians, will improve their sense of having roots in this land and will open their eyes to how rich our past is! No less rich than are the Egyptian or Sumerian cultures” (Mushynka 1995, 142). She attended conferences on archeology and even participated in an archeological expedition that excavated prehistoric

sites (Humenna 2004, 450-453). In her memoirs Humenna argues: “That world of my primitive relatives became more real than the reality” (ibid., 446). She asserts: “From that time until now this literature about primitive people and ancient gods became my favorite” (ibid., 444). For Humenna, construction of the myth about a pre-Christian past was a way to escape from reality and to cope with a trauma: “It is the most joyful game that liberates one from the present and saves one from schizophrenia [...], makes one immune to a miserable, poisoned climate” (ibid., 446). She elaborates further: “The lyrical, intimate, historical, and an interest in the past, were considered [by the regime] as escapes from the presence, something very similar to counterrevolution, because they were a denial of our present. However, my life is so destitute, so thirsty for new impressions. And I do not have any possibility of satisfying this hunger. The reality is so repulsive, standardized; there is nothing to breathe. I need to find a shelter for my soul. Let it be a prehistoric subject” (ibid., 447).

In her two novels Humenna attempts to represent the great achievements of a pre-Christian time. The author confesses that she is just an “amateur” in this subject, but states: “I do not worry that I want more than I presently have. This has been my credo from childhood – [...] to develop and improve myself” (Humenna 2004, 446).

The subtitle to the book *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie* is “a tale of Trypillia.” As a novel, it is a fictional narrative of considerable length and complexity. However, it neither portrays specific characters, nor presents a sequential organization of action and scenes. The characters of this story, in Humenna’s own words, are “ages, tribes, and their creations” (Humenna 1978, 6). This is not a work of fiction in the normal sense, but a description of how Trypillia might have looked and how it was rediscovered in recent times by archaeologists. This makes it a fictionalized work of history (or a fictionalized archaeology), a hybrid genre that is popular in documentary film-making today. The bibliography of this book consists of more than two hundred references. Most of them are well-known historians, archeologists, and writers: William F. Albright, Stuart Piggott, Erich Neumann, Samuel N.

Kramer, Gertrude R. Levy, Brian Goff, Ethel S. Drower, Herbert J. Rose, Norman Brown, Jane E. Harrison, Martin P. Nilsson, Mac Couulloch, Ivan Franko, Metropolitan Ilarion, Mykhailo Hrushevskiy, Oleksandr Potebnia, Volodymyr Shuhevych, Vadym Passek, Valentyn Danylenko, etc. Humenna interprets and presents evidence from archaeology, cultural anthropology and mythology, and uses this information to support her view of a prehistoric period in which, she maintains, women were valued as life-givers, goddesses were worshiped, and society was peaceful and egalitarian. Humenna assumes that knowledge about Tripillia is topical nowadays. She states: “now, when an evil power [nechysta syla] is trying to eliminate our customs, remodel a whole system of life, break our psyche, create artificial ersatz-rituals, destroy national uniqueness, knowledge of the past is a vital life-giving water” (ibid.).

The novel consists of two sections, throughout which Humenna traces the fate of matriarchy from its development until its downfall. Although the Trypillian civilization existed for three thousand years, the wide timeframe covered does not affect the coherence and informative nature of the book’s content. Humenna’s views on national identity can be approached from several perspectives: belief system, material culture, customs and rituals. All these aspects are woven together in the book.

A special role in communicating with the sacred world was undoubtedly played by items decorated with symbolic magic signs and images. Religious ideas and cults, according to Azar Gat, were a central cultural form in prehistoric states. Gat points out that “local cults, myths, and deities flourished in premodern societies, most notably in rural environments. Still higher religions, pantheons, and mythologies were shared across ethne [the plural of ethnos], penetrating the most remote of rural communities, even where no unifying state existed, let alone where it did (Gat 2013, 11). Propp argues that cults were created around deities in order to ask protection against “evil power”: “When the gods appear in human consciousness and human culture, myth becomes a story about deities or semideities” (quoted in Harrison 2016,

127). Excavations at Trypillian sites have revealed signs of widespread activity associated with one of the most common rituals: sacrifice. The sculpted human body is the most common among Trypillian artifacts, with female personages predominating. Indeed, the Great Goddess was at the centre of the spiritual world of the Trypillians (ibid., 166). According to the Russian historian Boris Rybakov, the imprint of a matriarchal culture and worship of the female goes back some 5000 years and is associated with Trypillia, which is located close to present-day Kyiv (Rybakov 1981, 18). Although matriarchal theory is considered controversial and there is a disagreement among scholars as to its exact nature, Humenna interprets it similarly to Simon Pembroke who states that matriarchy “was an entire epoch, dominated and virtually contained by a feminist materialist principle to which a whole series of cosmic and terrestrial representations necessarily corresponded, and which the more spiritual period of masculine ascendancy [that] succeeded it had to combat for every step of its ascendancy” (quoted in Rubchak 2009, 140).

In Humenna’s work numerous female effigies and images are reflected in the magical symbols of Trypillia. Trypillian civilization is known from the remains of various material objects richly decorated with abstract geometric and zoomorphic designs, including settlements, two-story dwellings, and clay objects (Lesiv 2013, 30). Surviving tools, pottery, ornaments, and sculptures give us clues regarding domestic activities, and offer hints about the fears, beliefs, hopes, and even affections of their owners.

According to Humenna, the Goddess was, above all, the Great Mother of the gods and all living things (Humenna 1976, 182). Her image became one of the main universal symbols and proto-images of the sacred and became known as *berehynia* [guardian]. According to Marian J. Rubchak the term was associated with *rusalky* [water nymphs] who protected *berehy* [riverbanks]. Moreover, there is no verification of when this term initially was applied to women, but likely it was “not until the late nineteenth century” (Rubchak 2009, 141). The Great Goddess, in Humenna’s view, revealed her power and her benevolence by appearing in

the form of various sacred personages. Her embodiments and attributes include: the moon, the earth, fire, water, land, grain, snake, bird and cow (Humenna 1976, 182-83). By revealing herself in these images the Great Goddess controls the whole power of nature and becomes the guardian of the living Earth. It is thought that the various manifestations of the Goddess demonstrated that the Trypillians saw her presence everywhere and thought of her as exerting power over all of nature.

According to Humenna, the oldest embodiment of the Goddess associated with Trypillian culture is the Bird Goddess (ibid., 179). Humenna gives visual representations of prehistoric artifacts in which women have bird's hands. The book is profusely illustrated with many sketches, probably done by Humenna herself. These depict pottery, images of goddesses, etc.



Modern pysanka with the Trypillian ornament (Humenna 1978, 202).



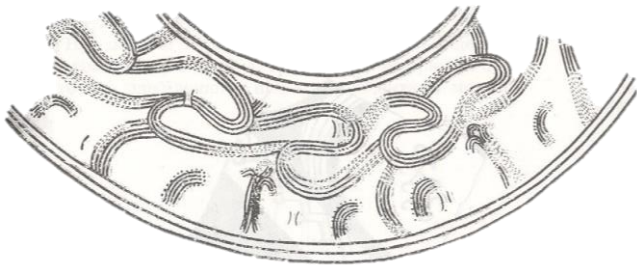
Modern pysanka with the Trypillian ornament (Humenna 1978, 301).



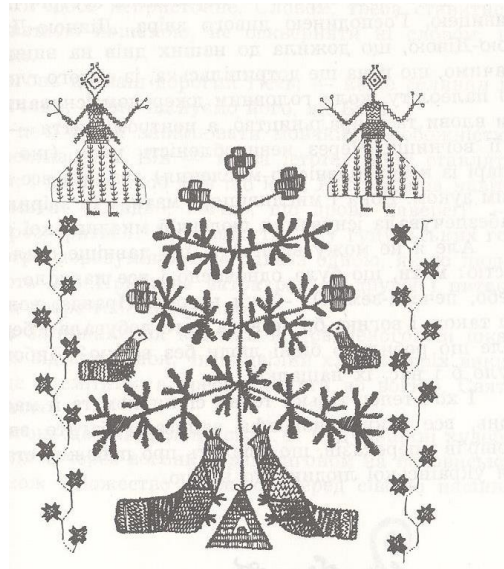
Trypillian pottery (Humenna 1978, 263).



Trypillian female figurine (Humenna 1978, 288).



Trypillian ornaments  
(Humenna 1978, 179).



Embroidered ornament. Tree of Life  
(Humenna 1978, 198).

Moreover, her other books dealing with archaeology, history, or Trypillia are also illustrated by her in this way. The author interprets the combination a woman with a bird as related to one of the most ancient legends about the origin of the world, which tells us that “the world appeared from a water-bird that floated on the water and bore the first egg” (ibid.). According to Humenna, there is a “strange coincidence” in the Ukrainian language and folklore. Many songs compare the mother with a stork, naming her with a short word “Lele” that is derived from a word “Leleka” (which means ‘stork’ in the Ukrainian language) (ibid. 242). Humenna informs that Ukrainian folk belief still maintains that the stork is a “protector of the homestead, where she had settled. She brings infants to the family, which is her [...] obligation” (ibid., 243). This indicates to Humenna that there is a spiritual connection between contemporary Ukrainians and their prehistoric matriarchal ancestors. Gat states that a shared system of codes and symbols as well as many other specific characteristics of the certain nation are linked with its protohistoric predecessors: “Certainly, what was adaptive in small aboriginal kin-culture groups has not necessarily remained so as human conditions changed radically through history. And yet in this, as in so much else, our natural

predispositions, shaped during our species' long aboriginal existence by tremendous forces of selection, remain extremely potent" (Gat 2013, 40).

Humenna makes an assumption that Trypillians connect the fertility of soil with the fertility of women. The seed is reborn after its seeming demise during its "burial" (ibid., 180). This provides an example and a hope that the same thing will happen with the deceased and their souls. The Earth Mother, according to the author, "bears the energy of nature and is a manifestation of the cosmic forces in Trypillian culture," forces that harbour the mystery of life and death (ibid., 180). The writer says that females were "inseparably linked" with the symbol of a tree, which was "obviously, a tree of life." This signifies to her that the Great Goddess is the "origin of life, the mother of everything" (ibid.). The magic practices of the Trypillian agrarians were, in her opinion, aimed at maintaining harmony in the universe. Their spiritual culture did not disappear without a trace. The great example is Ukrainian embroidery: "Often we can see the following subject on towels: the tree of life surrounded with animals, birds and flowers. This image is widespread not only among Ukrainians, but also among all Slavs" (ibid., 194). Mary Kelly, in her study of textiles in the ritual life of Slavic women, elaborates the idea of the ancient empowered matriarch. Kelly claims that the Eastern Orthodox praying goddess is among the most popular traditional images on embroidered ceremonial cloths (*rushnyky*) (Rubchak 2009, 131). The historian Boris Rybakov has his own interpretation of Trypillian clay figurine designs. He describes various fertility-related symbols. Among them he singles out the rhombus with a small dot as symbolizing a field with seeds. Rybakov draws a parallel between these earth images and human fertility (Rybakov 1981, 170).

Humenna highlights the insights she gained from several customs which appear to be the most representative of the matriarchal era and have been preserved until contemporary times. According to Marian J. Rubchak, wedding rituals are "considered by ethnographers to be among the most important indicators of social values" (Rubchak 2009, 141). The typical

ceremony of the Ukrainian wedding, which includes folk traditions, Humenna interprets as the “struggle between matriarchal and patriarchal societies,” where the male’s clan wants to take a woman from the resistant female’s clan (Humenna 1978, 142). The chronology from the “courtship ritual” until the “redemption” and settlement of a young girl in the house of her husband depicts the antagonism of opposite sexes. Rubchak points out that “widespread premarital sex appears to have been the rule in early Ukraine (although some controversy about this exists), a convention that apparently did not prejudice a woman’s marriage prospects any more than it would impair those of a man” (Rubchak 2009, 141). Rubchak appears to be referring to Medieval and early modern times, the eleventh to seventeenth centuries. Humenna illustrates marriage rituals through Ukrainian folklore. By analyzing ethnic songs, she wants to prove that after four thousand years Ukrainians still have the same traditions (Humenna 1978, 158). She provides no scholarly evidence for this, but appears to merely imagine that this might have been the case and asks the reader to make an imaginative connection.

The technology, forms and ornamentation of pottery allow us to define the cultural properties of archeological sites and reveal genetic ties between different cultures. It is a curious fact that during the interwar period Oleh Olzhych, a writer and one of the leaders of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) in emigration, was also interested in the Trypillian culture. The painted pottery of the Neolithic Age found in Galicia was the subject of his PhD thesis in Prague at Charles University. A scholarly knowledge of this topic enabled him to link the prehistoric past to contemporary Ukraine (Vedeiko 2008, 69). Leonid Mosendz, a writer who regularly published in the journal *Vistnyk* (Herald), one of the leading nationalist periodicals in Galicia and emigration during the interwar years, also attempted to affirm distant national origins. In the long poem *Volynskyii rik* (Volhynian Year, 1948), he reveals ancient legends and myths (Mosendz 1948, 71-72). In fact, the exploration of ancient origins, myths and legends was popular throughout Europe in the 1930s. Anthony Smith has



suggested that the reason for this fascination with mythology was its ability to make a connection with the past by retelling legends and sacred stories that serve to strengthen the national identity. Smith's work on the relevance of the ethnic origins of nations becomes central to his understanding of "why and where particular nations are formed, and why nationalisms, though formally alike, possess such distinctive features and contents" (Smith 1998, 191). He states that the role of myths, memories, values, traditions and symbols are powerful differentiators and reminders of the unique culture and fate of the ethnic community. These examples show that like Humenna, many interwar writers searched for perceived bonds with a distant past and expressed a desire to discover independent cultural traditions.

In her book *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie*, Humenna affirms that various figurines of Trypillia depict females of different ages, body structures and social status (ibid., 171). For instance, some sculptures have their own "thrones," which, the writer says, suggest an exalted status; they were "protectors of home hearth," "Mothers of the House" (ibid., 172). According to Natalia Burdo, the archeologist and author of the book *Sakralnyi svit Trypils'koi tsvyvilizatsii* (The Sacred World of Trypillian Civilization, 2008) seated women are prototypes of "the Mother of the Earth-Demeter, or the woman who launches genealogy and family welfare." She also adds that these women were usually depicted with "big sagging breasts" that are the result of "breastfeeding" (Burdo 2008, 193).

Material culture and the study of pottery also allow Humenna to shed light on the physical layout, social organization and demographic structure of Trypillian settlements. Gat claims that prehistoric societies had a sense of shared identity. The roots of group ethnocentrism and solidarity, according to some, take their origin in the interrelationship between kinship, culture, and social cooperation in the aboriginal protohistoric communities. Gat states the following:

It should be realized that the aboriginal human condition is not exotic, piquantly tucked in the remote beginnings of time. Quite the opposite. History's short span is illuminated by the bright light of written records. But beyond that very limited area under the lamppost, shrouded in the thick darkness of prehistory, real people of our species – for whom we have no names or a concrete record of events – lived over thousands of generations. We know from archaeology and anthropology that they were anatomically like us, created exquisite art, possessed a symbolic and linguistic capacity as advanced as ours, and belonged to regional groups divided by kinship and culture. Ethnicity – kin-culture reality and a sense of identity – is human-specific and universal extending far back to the beginning of our species” (Gat 2013, 36).

By referencing scholars, Humenna claims that the large settlements of the Trypillian culture were up to 270 hectares,<sup>14</sup> contained up to two thousand buildings, a population up to fifteen thousand people (Humenna 1978, 57-58). Some contemporary researchers agree with many of Humenna's ideas. Marian Rubchak, for example, elaborates the idea that communal affairs in Ukraine before recorded history were conducted around a clan's matriarch or “hearth mother,” who occupied the most strategic position. The scholar maintains that this ancient society “did not distinguish between public and private space, but as the various collective functions moved to a more public venue, the old kin-based collectivities were transformed into institutions that provided service to legitimized public ends. The destructured domestic realm was separated from the newly established public space, and the matriarch was displaced as the locus of proceedings and focus of solidarity; men and women began to inhabit separate worlds. A range of androcentric biases followed this realignment of power relations” (Rubchak 2009, 141).

Humenna tries to advance plausible answers as to why such enormous residential areas developed and eventually declined. She claims that the decline of these settlements was

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<sup>14</sup> The hectare is a metric system. One hectare contains about 2.47 acres

due to the destructive role of male-dominated nomadic tribes who invaded from eastern grasslands and conquered these peaceful societies. From that time, the third millennium BC, matriarchy ceased to be a ruling system (Humenna 1978, 314). Nevertheless, it left a permanent imprint that is visible in contemporary Ukraine, owing to the fact that customs and traditions, beliefs and forms of worship that came from prehistoric generations have contributed to making the contemporary human being and “have become an integral part of the Ukrainian mentality, thoughts and feelings. This is the firm rock against which all invaders, assimilations and diasporas have crashed” (ibid., 302). Furthermore, Humenna claims that the rich matriarchal culture over the ensuing centuries contributed to preventing Ukrainians from “becoming robots” and gave them the power to survive all “catastrophes and convulsions of their turbulent history and emerge as one united nation from the Carpathians to the Don” (ibid., 304).

According to Aleida Assmann, in recalling, reinterpreting, imagining, and discussing the cultural influence of the remote or recent past, societies “participate in extended horizons of meaning-production” (Assmann 2008, 97). She goes on to argue: “Through culture, humans create a temporal framework that transcends the individual life span relating past, present, and future. Cultures create a contract between the living, the dead, and the not yet living” (ibid., 97). This explains why Humenna incorporates the achievements of her imagined ancestors into her view of a continuous history. She understood these achievements formed the core of what later would become the Ukrainian people.

By presenting artifacts of prehistoric matriarchal culture she tries to give the reader an understanding of how Ukrainians came to the present juncture in human history and what they can hope for in the future. While examining excavated pieces of art and uncovering evidence, she interprets matriarchal politics, ritual, theology and the entire matriarchal worldview. Society in her view was centered around women. Women were revered for their mysterious life-giving powers, honored as incarnations and priestesses of the Great Goddess.

Females reared their children to carry on their line, created both art and technology, and made important decisions for their communities. According to Humenna, the period of matriarchy was a model of peace, plenty, harmony with nature, and egalitarianism between sexes. The main idea of this novel is summarized in a phrase that occurs in the last three sentences, where she says that “even though, the material evidence has disappeared, the spiritual has not. It has remained more solid than granite. The past did not flow into obscurity, but ran into the future” (ibid., 329).

### III.3. Connection between generations in *Velyke Tsabe* (1952)

One critic has characterized the second book, *Velyke Tsabe* as an “original reproduction of myths based on specific ethnographical and archeological materials” (Petrov 1952, 147). This book is a brief fictional prose narrative that can be defined as a short novel, insofar as it has a certain plot and characters. It consists of several chapters that are linked into one storyline. According to Humenna, the purpose of the novel is to explain “what the Trypillian culture was and what connection it has with us, Ukrainians” (Humenna 1952, 122). The title of the novel has a rather symbolic etymology. The word “tsabe” has two meanings: literal and figurative. The first one is “an exclamation with which bullocks are ordered to turn to the right.” The second meaning is “a respected, influential person, a dignitary, a big wig” and is used in a sarcastic way (Busel et al. 2007, 769). Humenna ironically identifies an authoritative male with this second definition. Therefore, the title “Velyke Tsabe” is a way of ridiculing men’s desire for power and suggests the natural superiority of matriarchy.

Throughout the book Humenna describes landscapes in different parts of Ukraine in an effort to reveal the wide spatial reach and distribution of prehistoric society. On one hand, early civilization in Ukraine covered lush forests in the north western part of the present state. She writes: “the sky converged with the ground far away; instead of the forest there were curly tops of trees that emerged from ravines, shining lakes were like bowls with water” (Humenna 1952, 23). On the other hand, in the Steppe of the South “there are only thistles

and high grass as thick as reeds” (ibid., 46). Petro Kurinnyi, a Ukrainian archeologist, in a review of the novel considers that Humenna was able artistically to combine different temporal and spatial frameworks in order to create a holistic image of the Trypillian world (Kurinnyi 1948, 151).

The plot of the story is framed within contemporary time. The main protagonist, Luka Savur, a man from the twentieth century, carves the skeleton of a Trypillian woman and then has a dream in which this young Trypillian girl “walked down from the pedestal, stepped up to him, and took his hand” (Humenna 1952, 5). They then move in time into the second millennium BC. In this way the novel makes a link between today’s Ukrainians and Trypillians. Now living in the ancient past, Luka falls in love with the young girl Iahilka. However, the law of matriarchal society does not approve of their relations “because misfortune will happen” if the marriage partners belong to the same tribe, meaning that they are distant relatives (ibid., 17). In Humenna’s novel, this indicates the wisdom of Mother-protectors, because such a rule in the Trypillian matriarchal culture against marrying within the tribe demonstrates care about the health of future generations.

In order to avoid the punishment of his tribe, Luka wants “urgently, hastily to find comrades, free and successful” (ibid., 19). Thus, he begins a journey to join other large nomadic tribes in which the ruler is a man. In comparison with matriarchal clans, these tribes are very rich and open to greater communication with other tribes. Luka is enthralled by the patriarchal generic structure: “things that he recently denounced and considered a great sin, he now praised, because he saw that everything here was more plentiful and wealthier” (ibid., 87). He has until now lacked an understanding of why “a person could not live as he/she wants to, but has to make each step according to women’s regulations” (ibid.). Therefore, Luka wants to be a Tsabe, a “big shot,” surrounded with fame and power. By showing this behaviour of the main protagonist, Humenna wants to demonstrate how the progress of civilization has influenced the outlook of human beings. She suggests that self-sacrifice, the

ethos of matriarchal civilization, became an outdated idea and was replaced by egoism, the desire for satisfaction and power. Luka takes away Iahilka from her native tribe and introduces her to the new patriarchal world. Everything is alien to the young girl in her new home. The mother-in-law puts a rough log over the threshold when Iahilka for the first time enter her husband's house: "Iahilka slipped and bowed low to her mother-in-law, thus showing that she would be submissive forever" (ibid., 87). This gesture, Humenna tells the reader, has an analogy in the wedding ceremony in contemporary Ukraine, when the bride bows to her mother-in-law and asks for a blessing. This is meant to show, as the writer explicitly states in her previous novel, that the "cult of the mother" altered its core and was directed instead at obedience toward male supremacy (Humenna 1978, 142). Marriage was a new kind of union composed of husband and wife, distinctly different from the former clan union. The result, according to Humenna, was that the culture of matriarchy began a decline, leading to its eventual downfall: "disaster followed disaster. Waters retreated, rivers and lakes dried up, there were no rains for the whole summer" (ibid., 95).

Nonetheless, the warmth of matrilineal bonfires calls the young couple back. Humenna's intention here is to show that the Trypillian man was strong, but at the same time susceptible to the world of women. However, Luka is not allowed to remain in this land of matriarchy anymore, because he has betrayed the primeval traditions (ibid., 104). As she is at pains to do throughout her writings, Humenna indicates that the matriarchal genetic code has not completely vanished, because the young lovers have left a descendent, who has transferred the priceless matrilineal heritage to future generations. With this myth Humenna tries to assert the origin and persistence of traditions that are deeply rooted in the Ukrainian mentality. The message of the novel is that a conflict existed and still exists between growers and hunters, one that is a conflict between female-dominated and male-dominated cultures.

Both Humenna's novels about the prehistoric past show two contrasting worlds. The first one is the world of matriarchy, where goddesses have been venerated as the givers and

supporters of life, and where women have been accorded a supreme position in society as well as in cults. Such a society of female-dominated social and cultic customs is opposed to the second world of fire and sword, the world of patriarchy, where “ardour” and “fury” dominate (ibid., 112). By examining contradictions between two social organizations, Humenna contrasts such concepts as life/death, heart/mind, nature/civilization, collectivist/individualist, power of world versus power of weapon, parity/hierarchy, and peace/war. Cynthia Eller states that in a scholarly sense the narrative of matriarchal utopia and patriarchal takeover constitute a powerful myth: “it was a tale told repeatedly and reverently, explaining things (namely, the origin of sexism) otherwise thought to be painfully inexplicable” (Eller 2000, 5).

Betty Reardon determines the relationship between patriarchy and the war system by arguing that “the more militarist society tends to be the more sexist are its institutions and values” (Reardon 1996, 14). Another scholar, Elster, makes a similar claim:

Patriarchy is a destructive structure for defining “proper relations between men themselves. Men in most societies are taught very early to be “masculine,” to respect only other men who are “masculine,” to compete with each other, to use women to create modes for exchange with each other, to hide their fears and composition from one another, to treat their sons differently than they treat their daughters. All of these dimensions of patriarchy – its assumptions, its values, and its divisions of labor - are crystallized and hardened in the military, the most patriarchal institution in an already patriarchal society. (quoted in Reardon 1996, 15)

In the view of one group of scholars, the interplay between various forms of masculinity is an essential part of how a patriarchal social order works. The dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic in relation to subordinated masculinities, as well as in relation to women. Furthermore, patriarchal systems have been so enduring because they make many women overlook their own marginal positions and feel instead secure and protected. Thus,

“patriarchy depends on the vulnerability of women. The war system feeds on it” (Reardon 1996, 45).

According to the narrator of *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie*, no ideology can eradicate the core of the Ukrainian mentality, which is the expression of a fundamentally matriarchal heritage, and “during the collapse of all ideologies, during the times of floundering among so many unsatisfying social ideals” this genetic system will be “the only door through which humanity can enter into the future” (Humenna 1978, 140). The democratic nature of Ukrainian society has roots in the Trypillian matriarchal community. Therefore, it is “an inevitable feature of each Ukrainian” (ibid., 141). Moreover, the narrator argues that “wherever fate throws Ukrainians, they convert inhospitable desert, jungle, and wilds into fertile agricultural land” (ibid., 310). Their love of liberty and peace have been tested by hundreds of generations, by invaders and alien inhabitants who wanted to impose their own authority. Ukrainians have exhibited a “disobedience” that has not allowed them to deny their love for freedom even under the most repressive conditions (ibid., 141).

Humenna draws parallels between Trypillia and other ancient societies in which slavery was the basic means of national organization: “in Egypt it was the Pharaoh and slave labour. In China it was the woman-slave. Ukraine never had a centralized despotic authority, as did Moscow and Asia.” Thus, the Ukrainian warrior was never “an imperialist exploiter” (ibid., 140). According to Humenna, such a harmonious outlook, which exhibits the influence of the matriarchal past, should be a model for “building the future coexistence of nations” in the framework of a humane democracy (ibid.).

#### III.4. Humenna’s vision of national identity

According to Benedict Anderson, every national community “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 1991, 6). In the case of Humenna, this imagined community expands to include



not only to those who are within society's historical memory but also those who existed on the territory of present-day Ukraine in the prehistoric past. Her national identity is rooted in a long cultural heritage and incorporates ideas that reach back long into ancient times. She envisions her nation as a product of seven thousand years of historical change, which originated in the peaceful Trypillian culture. She considers the Ukrainian collective identity today as an overlapping and intermingling of cultures that over the centuries, despite many breaks and schisms, have emerged as a shared understanding. This mixing of cultures created a unique territorial community with its own boundaries, and a heritage based on common myths, memories, values and symbols. This community shares many features with neighbouring communities and is fundamentally peace-loving and cooperative.

Anthony Smith calls this particular type of national image "pan-nationalism" that may "paradoxically take us beyond the nation." He goes on to argue that this type of nationalism is broader in extent and scope than the "normal" understanding of the concept as a movement or ideology. He claims that "through the rediscovery of an ethnic past [...] national identity and nationalism have succeeded in arousing and inspiring ethnic communities and populations of all classes, regions, genders and religions, to claim their right as 'nations' [...] of culturally and historically cognate citizens, in a world of free and equal nations. Here is an identity and a force with which even the strongest of states has had to come to terms, and it is one that has shaped, and is likely to shape, our world in the foreseeable future" (Smith 1991, 170). Smith goes on to argue that this unique type of national identity is able to create a "super-nation" that neither resembles the United States of America, "whose ethnic communities lack separate historic homelands" nor the Soviet Union, "whose national republics and communities may feel little cultural kinship beyond the common recent Soviet political experience," nor does it approximate the British and Belgium models, because "in those cases one ethnic or nation dominates the other" (ibid., 174-175). Smith highlights that "super-nation" is a multicultural, tolerant, and cooperative society that should be founded on

the basis of “common cultural heritage” and that is able to forge common “myths, symbols, values and memories out of this common heritage, in such a way that they do not compete with still powerful and vigorous national cultures. Only in this way can Pan-nationalism create a new type of collective identity, which overarches but does not abolish individual nations” (ibid., 175).

In both novels, therefore, Humenna attempts to prove that Trypillians are the direct ancestors of modern Ukrainians. Over many generations, aspects of the prehistoric matriarchal culture survived in the consciousness of people. Traces can be found in the contemporary Ukrainian way of life, in moral and ethical behaviour, customs and traditions, language and political ideals. Humenna tries to provide evidence of these ideas in a number of statements. After Ukraine became an independent country in 1991, in the letter of January 11, 1994 to Vadym Pepa, a contemporary Ukrainian writer, she asserted:

Everything has started to grow; everything is ready, wants to develop... But a formidable threat is looming. Could everything suddenly be changed into desolation and hopelessness? Is there place for optimism? There is. I found hope even where I was not looking for it, not in the present, but in the phrase of the archeologist Petrov concerning a distant era. He said: Ukraine has more than once undergone ruin, has gone through decline and deformation, but those times passed, the occupant disappeared, and Ukraine continued her natural way of development. [...] There have been 300 years of domination by Moscow’s occupier, 70 years of rule by the Bolshevik occupier, but now the age of natural development and renewal has come. It is essential to define what really is rising from the soil, and what is counterfeit in Ukrainian culture. [...] Retrieval of the prehistoric Ukraine is crucial. (Pepa 2004, 18).

Humenna’s view of collective identity has not attracted scholarly attention, but it appears to be particularly relevant in the present context, primarily because it supports the

view of culture as the product of steady accumulations over long periods of time and because it expresses confidence in deep roots. Myroslav Shkandrij argues that Humenna's vision of Ukrainian national identity is fundamentally pluralist:

The author sees nations as composite entities created over hundreds of year from different constituent groups. In her view, there are no homogeneous nations; each is the product of a complex intermingling of peoples and traditions. She saw herself and her people as a product of various historical periods. At points in her unpublished diary and her published memoirs she gives concrete expression to this idea by summoning all her ancestors, even those from prehistoric times. This vision of Ukrainian identity stands in opposition to the kind of essentialism propagated in the 1930s by some writers. (Shkandrij 2016, 106)

The term 'pluralism' depicts societies containing heterogeneous characteristics that encompass seemingly all forms of group-identity within a nation. The third edition of *Webster's New International Dictionary* (1971) defines this concept as "a state of condition of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain an autonomous participation in the development of their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization" (Connor 1994, 106). According to Azar Gat, there are no homogeneous or clear-cut states. The historian claims that nations were formed and disappeared at a certain point in history, thus "new similarities and differences continuously emerge, and processes of ethnic fusion and fission occur, shaping and reshaping group boundaries and identities" (Gat 2013, 6).

In her diary "Material do povisty Hnizdo nad bezodneiu" (Materials for the novel *A Nest Over the Abyss*, 1941-1943), Humenna makes clear her general interest in the subject of archaeology and matriarchy. These comments are revealing because they bring to light another reason behind Humenna's fascination with ancient cultures. A particular kind of feminism was one of the factors that drew her to examining matriarchy. Humenna, in her

diary, connects the progress of civilization with women's self-sacrifice, because females have a "concern for tomorrow," while men satisfy themselves with the "current moment" (Humenna 1947, 153). She suggests that "there are two poles: the male, which is separation, egoism, unclasping, destruction of another for one's own benefit. The second is the female, which is self-sacrifice, the feeling of unity, love" (ibid., 154). Humenna's enthusiasm concerning Trypillian culture is therefore linked not only to her sense of a national identity that is not limited within the frames of different ideologies, and that has its roots in distant origins. It is also linked to her feminism and view of civilization as a contest between male and female principles.

Humenna writes in her diary that her national identity was "neither Bolshevik, nor nationalist, nor Nazi. I am a citizen of the millennia" (Humenna 1947, 150). She goes on to say: "I do not walk on the last ten centuries, as do the nationalists, but wander over the millennia. I see my own people in the Trypillians and in the future citizen of the universe. I want to find the thread that links the primitive and highly intellectual. This is the idea of unity" (ibid., 132). Humenna in her memoirs states that no ideological system is everlasting. They are always changing: "What was a law yesterday, is today just childish play; [...] the systems are transitional in the chain of Eternity" (Humenna 2004, 445). All ideological systems, according to her, are based on "individualism, which is ambiguous," because the leader is always "ravenous, wolfish, vicious." He believes that it is "important that I feel good, even though whoever is next to me must die of hunger" (ibid., 445). Her aim therefore is to deepen and strengthen national consciousness and the identity of contemporary Ukrainians and imbue it with a feminist awareness.

In Pohribnyi's essay which is based on Humenna's correspondence with the author, she is quoted as asking a rhetorical question: "Why it is that all nations look for their historical roots, but we do not need this?" Nonetheless, she claims, "our history and culture are three millennia older than the history of the Jewish people; they are older than Greek

mythology, even than a display of ancient human thought in the collection of Hindu hymns.

The Rihveda is not only later than Trypillia, but draws on the essence of Trypillia”

(Pohribnyi 2009, 437). These quotations from her diary indicate that Humenna’s sense of national identity was based on a strong interest in ancient origins, myths of origin, on national mythology generally, and on establishing a genealogy that reached into the distant past.

Anthony Smith asserts that “a sense of national identity provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture. It is through a shared, unique culture that we are enabled to know ‘who we are’ in the contemporary world. By rediscovering that culture we ‘rediscover’ ourselves, the ‘authentic self’, or so it has appeared to many divided and disoriented individuals who have had to contend with the vast changes and uncertainties of the modern world” (Smith 1991, 17).

Humenna’s construction of the Ukrainian identity was a challenge to her contemporaries, who often had a much narrower “ethnic” or local view, or for whom it encompassed a narrower time frame, or a more masculine ideal. This construct remains a challenge to contemporaries, but finds supporters among those who imagine the Ukrainian identity as pluralist, tolerant, and multicultural, or at least multi-faceted.

## Conclusion

Humenna bequeathed her nation the most important thing – her works,  
creations of the mind, soul, and heart.

Time, in this specific case, appeared to be extremely cruel and unjust.

But eternity puts everything in its place, cogitates rationally;  
thus, descendants honour the one who deserves it.

(Pepa 2004, 18)

The previous chapters have illustrated Dokiia Humenna's representation of national identity. By reading and understanding the information contained in her narratives the reader is able to view Ukraine as a nation with insufficiently researched and unresolved historical traumas, which continue to haunt present-day society and influence its life in profound ways. History has repeatedly changed the fate of modern Ukrainians by shifting the boundaries of states and empires. Humenna's works suggest ways in which continuities can be discovered in this history.

Humenna's books tried to introduce a new perception of Ukrainian history and to portray how political and social traumas had influenced collective identity. Humenna experienced all these traumas of the twentieth century by herself. She witnessed the First and Second World Wars, the growth of authoritarian regimes (Soviet and Nazi) and their establishment in Ukraine, a genocide that led to the starving of millions of peasants during collectivization and the execution of the anti-Soviet intelligentsia. Using her own perspective and life experience, Humenna explored some controversial episodes in Ukrainian's past, especially the period of Stalinist repression and Nazi occupation. She does not speak for the whole of Soviet society, but the language of self that she shares helps explain what life was like under totalitarian rule. Her focus was on the evolution of national psyche throughout the tragic events that have defined Ukrainian life over the past hundred years. The consequences

of these conflicts can be felt even today, as society continue to try and make sense of historical events that were hardly incomprehensible to contemporaries.

There are many motifs in Humenna's works, but the question of identity, individual as well as collective, dominates the plots of her novels and memoirs. Focusing on the question of national identity allows the reader to better understand the motivations, ideals, and problems of Ukrainian society during her time. She was convinced that the roots of Ukraine's modern identity are to be found in its past, and especially in the most traumatic aspects of this past. Furthermore, she felt that portraying dramatic events from the past may help the nation to avoid or to minimize problems in the future. She considered it crucial that society pass its heritage from one generation to the next, in order to prepare its successors for challenges that might be experienced.

Dokia Humenna is still insufficiently researched Ukrainian author. Moreover, little research has been conducted to date examining the issues of national identity in the Ukrainian context. Additional work in the field of collective memory studies is required to better understand national identity formation, both during the Second World War and in ensuing decades.. Other recommendations for further research include the following: Humenna's particular kind of feminism (one linked to her fascination with matriarchal culture); her life in emigration (in Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Austria and Germany in the immediate postwar years and in New York after 1956); her books describing the Ukrainian community in North America; and her personal archives (diaries, journals, notes, letters), which are today stored in New York in the UVAN (The Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences) and the NTSh (Taras Shevchenko Scientific Society), in Minneapolis at the Immigration History Research Center, and in Chicago at the Ukrainian National Museum.

This thesis has aimed to examine the formation of the writer's national identity as described most completely in her memoirs *Dar Evdotei*. The analysis of this book traces how her sense of national consciousness was constructed during childhood and the beginning of

her literary career. Humenna's memoirs show the disastrous impact of the Bolshevik revolution on the Ukrainian people and their self-identification. The writer depicts the impact of terror and the politics of extermination associated with mass arrests, collectivization, and famine. The Five-Year Plan implemented by the Soviet authority was aimed at turning the Soviet Union from a backward country into a modern, industrial one. Privately owned farms were turned into state cooperatives. Peasants, who were a majority of the population, were forced to give away their land; otherwise they were sent to the Gulag. Many historians describe these practices as internal colonization, in which the state authority exploits what is inside its own country in order to move the entire nation in the desirable direction.

Humenna's memoirs also reveal how she became acculturated to a social environment that vastly undervalued her potential as a writer in the social structure in general and literary life in particular. The nature of her personality, along with her persistent quest for the truth, caused her continuous mental suffering and led to her persecution by the Soviet regime.

Humenna's childhood, which was spent close to nature, affected her outlook. Her education during the cultural flowering of the 1920s contributed to the formation of the writer's talent, and to her sense of national identity.

The Second World War, according to Amir Weiner, was "an unprecedented cataclysm that rocked the entire European continent. It shook institutions, identities, and convictions that, until then, appeared to be solidly entrenched" (Weiner 2001, 7). The period of the German occupation and the atrocities committed during the war by both Soviets and Nazis have become ingrained in historical memory, and are also considered by many as a collective trauma. Ukraine was in the middle of two intraeuropean colonization projects. As a result of this overlap, Ukraine was one of the most dangerous places to be in the 1930s and 1940s. More people were deliberately killed in Ukraine than in any other country during that period. History does not repeat itself but it does show people what is possible in the future. The need to examine societal traumas is great, so that future generations may be able to



understand the causes of historical events and their consequences. Only then, society is able to identify issues when they reappear again. *Khreshchatyi Iar* weaves together several storylines that chronologically unfold during the Second World War in the capital, Kyiv. These stories portray the ideological confusion of the time through the eyes of local citizens and the way they perceive the dramatic events. An analysis of the novel allows one to gain new insights into how individuals deal with the traumas suffered during wartime. Humenna's novel shows that many locals had no clear ideological preferences about the kind of government they wanted, and held inconsistent views on many issues. Most locals who decided to stay in Kyiv during the occupation at first had an optimistic outlook regarding the Germans; however, eventually they changed completely. Moreover, there were also citizens who were sympathetic to the Soviet regime. This part of the population believed that the Soviet leader was their one and only saviour. Both ideological systems were trying to radically change society. By destroying all cultural and educational institutions the Germans wanted to bring Soviet Ukraine back to a state of nature. The Soviets, on the other hand, were trying to force history forward by implementing the Five-Year Plan. When realization of these strategies was failed Hitler and Stalin punished their victims by extermination and mass starvation.

A great deal of the novel is concentrated on a highly controversial theme in Ukrainian history – the relationships between the nationalists (particularly those close to the OUN) and local Kyivites. Humenna depicted a split among Eastern and Western Ukrainians, who had been part of different states for many decades. She shows this clash from the local population's perspective. The novel exhibits characters who are targets of cultural disorientation and colonial dilemmas generated by major social changes. These changes bring about alienation and crises of national identity. By depicting various ideological tendencies, Humenna's aim was to contribute to a national consolidation. The author aimed to find a consensus among Ukrainians in their search for a common national path.

When society experiences extreme stress and exhausts its techniques for handling it, an alternative way of dealing with political and psychic disturbances is sought. Humenna promoted her own vision of Ukrainian identity as a form of collective therapy. A shift from authoritarian models of identity into a democratic one, in Zagorka Golubovic's point of view, is a complex process because it raises the "problem of changing structural and socio-political reality in these [transitional] societies, i.e., the question of the extent to which these changes have penetrated into the very foundation of the totalitarian system, in particular into the mechanisms of power as well as into the mental structure of the power elites and the greatest part of the population" (Golubovic 1999, 29). A link with the prehistoric past provides a reassuring outlook on national identity and future cultural development. In Humenna's two novels *Mynule plyve v pryideshnie* and *Velyke Tsabe*, she tries to re-enter the past of her nation and to link her society to the chain of generations, thereby providing its collective identity with a greater sense of dignity. By depicting peaceful Trypillian culture, Humenna was able to create new principles of ethics and morality during the time of trauma and identity crisis. Through the prism of this millennial view of cultural development, Humenna criticizes any manifestation of authoritarianism and racism. She highlights the need to overcome an orientation that is connected to the totalitarian model of collective identity. She envisions Ukraine as a pluralistic and democratic society, which has close ties with the universal values of a much broader community or civilization. Shkandrij has claimed that she embraced a concept of nation that was "democratically diverse, based on the idea of evolutionary change" (Shkandrij 2016, 107). Humenna herself repeatedly stated that Ukraine a product of various histories with perplexing traditions and multiple identities. Therefore, her vision of the nation was not based on a desire to see homogenization, but on an appreciation of differences. Her novels convey the idea that identities, like cultures, are never fixed, and an understanding that they undergo changes over time. Therefore, she suggests that there can be no homogenous nation with a "pure" identity. Humenna insists that all who

throughout the millennia have lived in the Ukrainian land and experienced subjugations, fusions, ruins, and colonizations, have left their mark on today's Ukrainian society. She tries to establish and explicate the spiritual connection of contemporaries with the prehistoric past, one that affirms the right of Ukrainian citizens to an appropriate place among the international community of peoples and states, in the present and future.

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