6. Conclusion and Outlook

Due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a variety of new, independent states came into existence—such as Ukraine—which were confronted with the task of consolidating themselves as sovereign nation-states. In the context of their state- and nation-building, they had to outgrow the Soviet identity they had developed in the past and instead create a new, meaningful bond of social cohesion, and anchor it sustainably in a multinational society.

Considering Ukraine's long history of foreign rule and the lasting impact of assimilation politics (see chapter 2), the evolution of Ukrainian belonging has been a dynamic and complex process shaped by historical, political, and cultural factors. Having been grounded in ethno-cultural factors for most of its history, like language and culture, Ukrainian belonging has been challenged by assimilation politics under both imperial Russian and Soviet rule, whose Russification had a lasting impact on Ukrainian belongingness. This is most visible in the prevailing widespread use of Russian instead of the Ukrainian language and in persisting Soviet nostalgia among the population. Since independence in 1991, the country has undergone an ambivalent nation-building process (see chapter 3): While most governments pursued a moderate Ukrainization process, especially by fostering the Ukrainian language, they were confronted with strong demands from the Russian minority trying to preserve their past privileges from Soviet times, which is exemplified by the language controversy in Ukrainian society. In this context, Ukrainian politics were characterized by opposing politics of belonging, depending on which political faction —pro- Ukrainian or pro-Russian—their actors belonged to.

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Celebrating 30 years of independence in 2021, Ukraine has long been seen as a deeply divided country: torn between Soviet nostalgia and close ties with Russia as opposed to the growing desire to position itself as a unique nation that is independent from Russia as a result of its complex nation-building (see chapter 3). In this light, the loss of Crimea to Russia, the outbreak of the armed conflict in the Donbas in 2014 and its escalation into Russian war against Ukraine in 2022 demonstrate the costs of the country's nation-building process, as the fragmented national belonging seems to be the reason for the conflict at first. While the vast majority of Western and Central Ukrainians have come to strongly identify themselves as Ukrainian, the sense of Ukrainian belonging has traditionally been much weaker among Southern and Eastern Ukrainians, where the ethnic Russian minority mainly lives, while ties to Russia and Soviet nostalgia have remained stronger there than in other regions (see chapter 3). From this perspective, the loss of Crimea to Russia and the outbreak of armed secessionist conflict in the Donbas, both in Eastern Ukraine, seem to be the logical outcomes of the past Ukrainization politics at first, hindering the Southern and Eastern population in developing a stronger identification with Ukraine, but strengthening their affiliation to Russia as their historical homeland, considering the region's history.

In view of the ongoing conflict or war, the research questions arise as to *how national belonging is constituted in Ukraine* and *what impact the armed Donbas conflict has had on it.* Considering that one's sense of national belonging may change at certain biographical (turning) points, as, for example, crises and wars can put national identities to an extreme test, an *analysis of national belonging of IDPs*, who are among the most affected by the conflict, can contribute to the understanding of how national belonging evolves under certain political, social, and historical circumstances.

For this reason, the narrative interview method was chosen to examine individuals' sense of belonging to Ukraine from a biographical perspective. Viewing biography as a dialectically developing social construct, the biographical approach enables us to analyze the intertwining of the subjective and societal levels (see chapter 4). The Grounded Theory methodology was chosen as it emphasizes the development of findings and theory from the data itself and reflectivity within the research process (see chapter 4).

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My analysis reveals that contemporary Ukrainian national belonging is based on a mixture of markers of belonging (see chapter 5).[83] Among others, the Ukrainian language and culture, historical memory, and the belief in specific values, like democracy and the need for activism, play a role in contemporary ›Ukrainianness‹. Unlike national identity, belonging is conceptualized as both ethnic and civic at the same time (see chapter 2). Nonetheless, my analysis supports the general consensus on Ukrainian identity among scholars, stressing the strengthening of the civic, inclusive side of Ukrainian belonging, but also its (ethno-)cultural character, which has been actively promoted by past Ukrainian governments (see chapter 3).

As belonging is based on both *inclusion* and, concurrently, *exclusion*, the analysis here demonstrates how these markers of belonging serve to stress the unifying bond between Ukrainians as well as to demarcate themselves from others. Because Russia is considered to be Ukraine's historic ›other‹ and now even its enemy due to their conflict, the aforementioned elements of national belonging serve to stress the need for Ukraine's linguistic, cultural, historiographic, and political distinction from Russia. The anti-Russian foreign policy orientation, combined with a pro-EU attitude, mark the tip of Ukraine's multifaceted emancipation from Russia since its independence. The importance of demarcation from Russia becomes apparent when considering both countries' asymmetrical relationship, in which Ukraine, being regarded as a subordinated branch of the encompassing ›Eastern Slavic‹ unity of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians under Russian leadership, is denied its sovereignty and independence from Russia (see chapters 1 and 3).

Taking history into account, war is closely linked to the emergence of nations in many cases. On the one hand, conflict and wars promote the evolvement of national belonging. On the other hand, national belonging is a weapon in conflicts and wars (see chapters 1 and 2, Hall and Malešević 2013: 4f). This becomes prominent with Ukraine's politics of belonging or nation-building, which has been intensified by the conflict, given the tem-

83 Commonality stresses the idea of sharing certain aspects like (the myth of) a common descent, culture, language, religion, experiences, practices, or values, which can be linked to any social group, among others, a nation (cf. Anthias 2022: 331f.).

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poral coincidence between the conflict's outbreak and state policies, for example, on language or historical memory. This underpins the idea that national belonging can change under different circumstances, in particular when national belonging is questioned, contested, and threatened (see chapter 2). In this light, I argue that belongingness to Ukraine, along with the significance of certain markers of belonging, has been reinforced by the armed conflict in the Donbas. Concurrently, the need for distancing and emancipating Ukraine from and criticism of Russia has increased. The collectively shared experiences of suffering and making sacrifices serve as ›glue‹ for Ukrainian belonging. This becomes apparent, for example, as activism for the sake of the country has increased or with regard to the antagonistically depicted Ukrainian–Russian relationship.

In the following, I outline the central findings of my thesis in detail, sorting them according to markers of belonging and embedding the findings into a broader societal context.

Concerning ancestry (see chapter 5.2), my analysis indicates that Ukrainian ancestry does not play a major role in self-identification—either for the IDPs interviewed or on a broader societal level. On the individual level, ancestry was rarely addressed by the interviewees, in contrast to other markers of belonging. In cases where ancestry was mentioned, my analysis suggests that ancestry has to be seen as a relic of the Soviet nationality regime, which equated nationality with ethnicity and not residence or citizenship. The low importance of ancestry as a marker of belonging can be explained, firstly, with the growing civic nature of national identity (see chapter 3), for which ancestry cannot be a marker of belonging due to its exclusive character. Secondly, ancestry is a problematic marker of belonging for those with a biography of migration, even if they were born in Ukraine. The conflict has most likely intensified a feeling of being torn between both affiliations and thus stresses the need for other inclusive markers of belonging. This becomes most prominent in my sample with the Russian interviewees, who strongly self-identify with Ukraine. Thirdly, I argue that ancestry's low significance as a marker of belonging is linked to its low visibility, compared to other markers. This result is ambivalent: On the one hand, studies emphasize the growing civic or inclusive character of ›Ukrainianness‹, but on the other hand, mainstream schol-

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arship on national belonging stresses that it expects the mobilization and polarization of ethnic identities. Thus, we need further research to show if the war will reverse the general trend towards an inclusive, but culturally based understanding of ›Ukrainianness‹.

In the case of language (see chapter 5.3), the findings indicate its relevance as a marker of belonging due to its visibility as a marker of belonging and thus loyalty to Ukraine. This finding is particularly striking given the previously low relevance of language use for an individual's sense of belonging to Ukraine. The relevance of the Ukrainian language as a marker of belonging unfolds when reflecting on the country's history: Having experienced assimilation politics under imperial Russian and Soviet rule, which promoted the Russian language as a lingua franca or statewide language especially, its impact on contemporary Ukraine lies in the historical dominance of the Russian language in Ukraine, especially in the South and East. Whereas the Ukrainian language was devalued and marginalized, Russian was the prestigious language in Ukraine for a long time. Consequently, national and linguistic affiliations did not coincide for many Ukrainians, even ethnic ones, for a long time. At the same time, ›Sovietification‹ politics changed the population ratio in most Soviet Republics by prompting the migration of ethnic Russians. The dominance of the Russian language and the strong Russian minority in the Donbas are the framework within which the Donbas conflict has to be illuminated: By setting up the narrative that the Russian(-speaking) minority in Ukraine is threatened by the radical Ukrainization politics of fascist Ukrainian government(s), which came to power following the Euromaidan in 2013/14, Russia legitimized its intervention in Ukraine as the urgent need to defend its compatriots. This relates to a second narrative of the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians as one and the same people, though under Russian hegemony. Such narratives are invented strategically to legitimize a party's own position in a given conflict. However, they do not have to be the truth, considering the moderate Ukrainization politics, as assessed by various international scholars working on Eastern Europe, the persisting dominance of the Russian language in Ukraine in everyday life and tertiary education or the lack of a fascist threat to the Russian(-speaking) population in Ukraine. However,

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the language controversy between Ukraine and Russian has repeatedly been played on by Russia so that certain scholars suppose Russia planned the secessionist movement in Ukraine in advance or at least successfully used it for its own goals. Against the background of Russification and the instrumentalization of the language controversy in the Donbas conflict, the significance of the Ukrainian language as a marker of belonging lies in its potential, as an audible marker of self-identification with Ukraine, to demonstrate loyalty to Ukraine and concurrently distancing from Russia, which is blamed for the conflict by Ukraine. The approval of the Ukrainian language by the branch of reformist, pro-Ukrainian Muslims demonstrates this in particular. In the face of the armed conflict in the country, the interviews indicate the growing importance of the Ukrainian language as a marker of belonging, given the societal tendency among the population to switch from Russian to Ukrainian in their everyday communication. This illustrates how Ukrainians bring their (ethno-) linguistic and national affiliations in line by switching to Ukrainian as the language of their ancestors, considering the linguistic divide among the population as a consequence of Russification politics. The importance of the Ukrainian language as a marker of belonging also unfolds given the power of Russian propaganda in this conflict on the people's perception of the conflict, which Ukraine is trying to fight against, considering the Donbas conflict is also an informational battleground. Ukraine's strategy is hereby to support Ukrainian(-speaking) media productions, while cutting off Russian media productions (see chapter 5.4 on culture). The social-constructivist character of national belonging becomes apparent, besides the Russification politics, in independent Ukraine's linguistic policy of promoting the Ukrainian instead of the Russian language. This demonstrates a general linguistic emancipation from Russia: to bridge social cleavages in the country and as a means to decrease Russian influence symbolically and strategically on the country. Drawing a historical line under the Soviet language politics of Russification, it seems like the Ukrainian state is turning the tables with its promotion of the Ukrainian language. Nonetheless, the linguistic issue in Ukraine has conflict potential as too harsh further promotion of the Ukrainian language could split the population, especially in the Southeast, where the Russian language

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is still dominant, given that identification with Ukraine has traditionally been lower there than in the Ukrainian-speaking West and Center. This could increase the pressure on ethnic Russian Ukrainians if language use is considered to be a symbol of patriotism. Hence, ethnic Russians might feel torn between their Russian and Ukrainian identities, but not necessarily to the detriment of their belongingness to Ukraine. However, recent studies do not underpin this concern, as illustrated by the ethnic Russian interviewee in my sample. This demonstrates that other Ukrainian markers of national belonging become more relevant when (ethno-)linguistic and national affiliations do not coincide. Thus, given the large incongruity between ethno-linguistic and national belonging among the population, the implementation of Ukraine's linguistic nation-building will be of importance for social cohesion in the country and Ukraine's relationship to and emancipation from Russia. Though the Ukrainian language may not be important to a majority of Ukrainians at the moment, it will most likely further increase in importance as a marker of belonging, at least for the younger and upcoming generations, considering the impact of the state's pro-Ukrainian linguistic course. Further research is needed to illuminate if the thesis of a linguistic change among Ukrainians as a form of individual linguistic emancipation from Russia is taking place and if yes, to what extent and with what meaning for a contemporary sense of Ukrainian belonging.

With regard to Ukrainian culture (see chapter 5.4), my analysis shows that its relevance lies less in concrete customs, traditions, and cultural assets in defining ›Ukrainianness‹, but in its potential to visibly demonstrate loyalty to Ukraine and concurrently difference to Russia. This becomes most visible with the traditional clothing vyshyvanka. However, my analysis reveals how Ukrainian culture first has to cast off its former negative associations as backward and nationalistic during the Soviet era to become a positively connoted marker of belonging. This task is even harder given the concern about growing nationalism in the negative sense in Ukraine.[84] At the same time, Russian culture is devalued, considering the

84 Whereas Ukrainian nationalism is said to have become more inclusive following the ›Orange Revolution‹ in 2004/5 (see chapter 3), the ›Euromaidan‹ in 2013/14 and the

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commonalities between it and Ukrainian culture. Given the state's promotion of Ukrainian(-speaking) media and artwork production and the concurrent casting off of Russian media and artwork production, this displays the political and strategical relevance of culture as a means of war as well as the conflict's impact on Ukraine's intensifying (linguistic and) cultural nation-building and its emancipation process from Russia. The importance of culture and language unfolds given the fact that the Donbas conflict is also an informational battleground. The armed conflict in the country has most likely intensified the need to visibly demonstrate belongingness to Ukraine and, thus, the relevance of cultural assets as markers of belonging. Thus, the relevance of cultural assets depends on and grows with their visibility. Further research is needed to illuminate the role of cultural assets, like the vyshyvanka, in the light of the ongoing war and how Ukraine is emancipating itself culturally from Russia on the individual, practical, and societal levels.

In the case of historical memory (see chapter 5.5 on historical narratives), its relevance as a marker of belonging lies in the power of historical narratives to create an antagonistic relationship between Russia and Ukraine and thus legitimize Ukraine in the Donbas conflict. I reconstructed the impact of the Cossack and Holodomor heritages, both of which play an important role in independent Ukraine's nation-building process in terms of Ukrainian belongingness and in Ukraine's role in the Donbas conflict: Whereas Ukraine is positively associated with values such as love of liberty, equality, and democratic tradition, Russia is negatively associated with values like unfreedom, aggressiveness, and autocracy. Hence, Ukraine is portrayed as the victim, historically struggling for free-

armed conflict in the Donbas raise concerns about current Ukrainian nationalism, in particular its far-right tendencies. This was visible in the presence of far-right groups at the Euromaidan or currently in the forming of volunteer battalions to fight the separatists in the Donbas. However, this perception is disputed. Among others, the lower participation of far-right groups in the Euromaidan, the low electoral support for far-right parties in Ukraine, compared to other European countries, and the difference between civic and ethnic, chauvinistic nationalism are pointed out (cf. Kuzio 2020, Shekhovtsov and Umland 2014, The Guardian 2019, Minich 2018). This image of Ukraine has thereby been important for the framing of the conflict, as was already discussed (see 5.3 and 5.5.).

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dom and independence from its historic, aggressive enemy Russia. In this light, I argue that a set of narratives has been created which draws a historical line from past (Tsarist, imperial, and Soviet) to current Russian aggression in Ukraine, but also other countries of its former sphere of interest. The social-constructivist perspective stresses that nation-building is based on ›narrating a nation‹ so that historical memory is subject to influence and manipulation. In this context, my analysis demonstrates how Ukraine is emancipating itself from Russia by creating its own historiography, breaking away from its Soviet roots and persisting Russian dominance on Ukrainian history. My research has addressed former taboos, e. g. the Holodomor, but, at the same time, shows how Ukraine is rewriting its own history, which is different from the Soviet and Russian perception, for example, when stressing its (democratic) Cossack history or defining the Holodomor as Soviet genocide on Ukraine, blaming Russia as its legal successor. In addition, I argue that the armed conflict in the Donbas has intensified Ukraine's politics of memory, given the temporal coincidence between the outbreak of the conflict and the country's recent policies: of de-communization, most likely aimed at extinguishing the country's Soviet past, rather than critically reflecting on it, and the country's rapprochement towards Western instead of Russia's culture of commemoration concerning WWII, including a critical view of the USSR. The significance of Ukraine creating its own historiography and its impact on Ukrainian national belonging reveals itself when we consider the asymmetrical relationship between Russia and Ukraine, in which Ukraine is regarded as a subordinated branch of the encompassing ›Eastern Slavic unity‹ and, thus, is denied its existence. As a consequence, historical memory has become an important battleground as well as a strategic force in the context of the Donbas conflict, especially when considering the use of genocide narratives by Ukraine and Russia to frame the conflict in their own favor. The conflict most likely has thereby helped to reduce the historical memory cleavages in the country in the sense of a rapprochement towards historical memory among the population, which can be traced back to the success of independent Ukraine's new historiography. However, we need to critically reflect on the ideological background of such narratives, no less in Ukraine than in Russia. Lastly, the significance of histor-

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ical memory as a marker of belonging seems to be limited, given its low visibility as marker of belonging. Against this background, we need further research on the development of Ukrainian historiography, in particular the state's politics of memory and commemoration, and on Ukrainian belonging on the individual level, which is mostly visible in the power of narratives. Moreover, it is necessary to analyze historical memory from the perspective of other markers of belonging, like language.

If we focus on common political principles (see chapter 5.6 on democracy), their relevance as a marker of belonging lies in demonstrating distinction from Russia, which is perceived as a threat to Ukraine in the face of the armed conflict in the Donbas and thereby serves to legitimize Ukraine's position in it. My analysis demonstrates a preference for an inclusive rather than ethnic-exclusive Ukrainian nation, which I discussed exemplarily with the issue of citizenship. However, citizenship does not appear to be an important marker of belonging as it was only mentioned briefly and infrequently in the interviews. Most likely, this can be explained with its low visibility and self-evidence for Ukrainian citizens because citizenship is not questioned or disputed among the Ukrainian population, unlike other markers of belonging, such as language. In contrast, the belief in common political values, more concretely, in democracy, is more salient as a marker of belonging in the interviews. In this context, my analysis shows how the belief in democratic principles and a preference for an inclusive Ukrainian nation or statehood go together. This was illustrated by the Crimean Tatar Muslim interviewee, who stressed the importance of legal equality and minority rights from the perspective of the Muslim community in Ukraine. The significance of civil rights and liberties for Ukrainians unfolds when we bear in mind the international criticism of Russia in Crimea and the Donbas, which has nurtured the negative image of Russia in Ukraine (see chapter 5.5 on historical narratives). This is most prominent in the case of the Crimean Tatar and Muslim interviewee, who addresses the deterioration of human rights for Crimean Tatars, Muslims as well as pro-Ukrainian people living directly or indirectly in former Ukrainian territory that is controlled by Russia. In this light, the narrative becomes apparent that Ukraine will be at stake if Russia succeeds in its war against Ukraine, not only in seizing

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the country politically, but also socially considering the deterioration of human rights in Crimea and the Donbas but also in Russia, whose democratic constitution has been worsening for years. Although historically Crimea is not Ukrainian but Russian in large part, Ukraine is preferred, most likely because it grants specific rights to its citizens, especially concerning the freedom of religion, in contrast to Russia. Unlike citizenship, a pro-democratic attitude is important to most interviewees, especially as it was not part of a direct question, although it was not a visible marker of belonging like language. In sum, a pro-democratic attitude is important for contemporary Ukrainian belonging with a preference for an inclusive understanding of the Ukrainian nation—which has been strengthened by the Donbas conflict. Further research is needed to illuminate what role the concept of democracy plays on an individual level, especially in Ukraine's demarcation from Russia, and how it is embedded into the state's politics of belonging.

Concerning foreign policy orientation (see chapter 5.7), its relevance lies in a clear demonstration of an interest in Ukraine's future economic, political, and military partnership with the West, to Russia's displeasure. My analysis demonstrates that Russia and the EU are the primary ›others‹ against which Ukrainian national belonging has to be defined: While Russia is portrayed as the evil enemy, threatening Ukraine's sovereignty and independence, the EU is depicted as Ukraine's friend. Briefly, Russia is viewed as Ukraine's ›other‹ under which it has suffered historically (see chapters 2 and 5.5): from a long history of foreign rule under Tsarist and imperial Russia to the Soviet Union, forcing assimilation politics upon and harming or destroying Ukrainians with the Holodomor, to ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014. Hence, the Donbas conflict is not viewed as a legitimate secessionist conflict, as Russia frames it (see the connection to language and history), but as part of Russia's broader geopolitical aspirations, which affect all contemporary states in the former Soviet sphere of influence. Russian geopolitical aspirations are explained with reference to ›Novorossiya‹ and ›Russkiy Mir‹: In a nutshell, the dominant nationalist ideology of this time considers Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians to be one and the same people, namely Eastern Slavs, although under Russian leadership as Russia sees itself

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as the legal successor to the medieval Empire of the Kievan Rus'. Thus, Ukraine is being denied an independent existence. At the same time, Putin and other advocates of this ideology stress that most Ukrainian territories should be historically seen Russian as they had belonged to the Tsarist and imperial Russian Empire and had been Russian gifts to Ukraine during Soviet times (especially Crimea). In this tradition, Ukraine, or at least its Southern and Eastern parts, are considered to be Russian. This is further stressed by references to the large ethnic Russian minority living there, which, however, has to be traced back to ›Sovietification‹ politics of strategically settling ethnic Russians in other Soviet Republics. In this light, this ideology stresses Russia's responsibility to protect ethnic Russians abroad, and thereby also regards Eastern Slavic people to be Russian compatriots. The ongoing war in Ukraine has to be understood from this perspective: With Russia seeking to restore its former imperial and Soviet glory, and thereby regarding Eastern Europe as part of its own sphere of influence, any rapprochement between Ukraine and Western countries and alliances is criticized and actively prohibited. In addition, Russia's deteriorating democratic condition also plays a role here. In contrast, the EU appears as the perfect alternative partner, as the key to a peaceful, democratic, and economically prosperous future. My analysis demonstrates a more nuanced image of Russia than of Europe. Most likely this can be explained by the fact that Russia is the threat against which Ukraine has to defend itself, while the EU is perceived as a friend. The choice for future cooperation and even Ukraine's possible future accession to the EU is legitimatized with economic advantages, freedom of travel, cultural, scientific and educational exchange, strategic reasons for partnership, and the closeness between Ukraine and Europe with regard to history and democratic, liberal values in contrast to Russia. My analysis mirrors the broader societal trend of a growing anti-Russian but pro-European attitude among Ukrainians. However, this does not mean that Ukrainians do not see the EU, USA, or NATO critically, especially considering the impact of an alliance with one of those three on Ukraine. Strikingly, the interviewees did not address the most dominant international political military bodies, namely, the US and NATO. The general state of research shows a growing desire among Ukrainians for their country to

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join the North Atlantic alliance, which has been strengthened by the conflict. Lastly, the armed conflict has strengthened the preference for cooperation with the EU and decreased Ukrainians' interest in cooperation with Russia. In this light, we need further research on how the involvement of key international political and military actors, in particular the US, NATO, and the EU, influences Ukrainians' view of them and thus their foreign policy orientation. At the moment, Ukrainians hold strong positive views on Western actors, but the criticism of their hesitant support for Ukraine, especially concerning its accession to Western alliances, might challenge those views.

A negative view of Russia does not necessarily go hand in hand with a negative attitude towards the Russian people. Furthermore, not all Ukrainians display a negative attitude towards Russia, but a positive assessment of Russian–Ukrainian ties. In this context, we need to shed light on Soviet nostalgia and the positive image of and regret about the Soviet past. Soviet nostalgia is based on a positive assessment of economic prosperity, social welfare as well as peace among the different peoples in the Soviet past, which serves as a contrasting foil for Ukraine's challenges since independence. This contributes to explaining the differences in the dissemination and manifestation of national belonging among Ukrainians. Parallel to the strength of Ukrainian belonging, Soviet nostalgia is more common among Eastern and Southern Ukrainians, which is understandable considering the region used to belong to imperial Russia and the USSR, than among Western and Central Ukrainians. At the same time, Soviet nostalgia most likely complicates and even hinders the evolvement of a (strong) sense of Ukrainian belonging. Briefly, Ukrainians who display Soviet nostalgia are more likely to support the separatist movement in the Donbas and Putin's geopolitical aspirations of the USSR 2.0 as they feel little to no affiliation to Ukraine, but to Russia as the USSR's legal successor. However, my analysis suggests that an ethnic Russian descent does not make someone Russia's compatriot in fighting for Russia and against Ukraine, as opposed to the dominant Russian ideology outlined before. Moreover, Soviet nostalgia is fading out with new generations of post-Soviet born Ukrainians and especially due to the conflict, which reinforces Ukrainians' negative (re-)assessment of the Soviet past and Russia in the light of the ongoing conflict with Russia.

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Against the background of the conflict and Russia's role in it, the relevance of activism as a marker of belonging lies in the fact that it visibly demonstrates loyalty to Ukraine. My analysis suggests that political commitment is growing among the population, and thus so is its relevance as a marker of belonging, which is most likely linked to Ukraine's recent challenges: from the Euromaidan, the loss of Crimea, and the outbreak of the armed conflict in the Donbas up to the ongoing war with Russia since 2022. For example, the Donbas conflict and its escalation into war in 2022 revealed the country's lack of efficient structures, resources, and personnel to be able to cope with such challenges, especially concerning the army. The citizens' commitment ranges from participating in demonstrations and non-violent commitment within the conflict's context to engagement in the country's armed forces as well as in volunteer battalions. The interviewees stress that it was due to the population's resistance that Ukraine ›survived‹ and thus continues to be a sovereign state. The ongoing Donbas conflict has intensified political commitment among the Ukrainian population as activism is a means with which to visibly demonstrate which side one is taking in the conflict: to demonstrate loyalty to Ukraine and concurrently distance to Russia. The relevance of activism might grow the more someone is affected by the conflict, as demonstrated by the case of Crimean Tatar (and) Muslim Ukrainians. Their case is striking: Although Crimea's history has, historically seen, been intertwined with Russia longer than with Ukraine, they strongly oppose Russia as their rights are framed as being at stake if Russia takes over Ukraine. Therefore, the reformist, pro-Ukrainian branch of the Muslim community in Ukraine even considers activism to be a Muslim duty that is compatible with Islamic law. The relevance of activism as a visible marker of belonging also becomes prominent in the case of Ukrainians even being willing to take up arms. Although we cannot equate verbal statements with real behavior, the emphasis on activism remains significant in analyzing this marker of belonging. This marker of belonging is one of the most open ones, especially for non-ethnic Ukrainians. In this context, the case of ethnic Russian Ukrainians demonstrates that an ethnic Russian background does not make someone Russia's compatriot, who will fight against Ukraine. Nonetheless, activism can only take place if citi-

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zens have resources left over for it, which demonstrates the problems of committing oneself to the country when lacking the basic resources, e. g. time, financial security, etc., to do so. Thus, the importance of activism also becomes prominent in its inclusive, unifying character, as despite their linguistic, ethnic, religious, or cultural differences, Ukrainians can unite in their commitment to the country. If we bear in mind the comparatively weak theoretical conceptualization of activism as a marker of belonging and the little research on it in the case of Ukraine, this study contributes to the theoretical discussion in general and the discussion about Ukrainian belonging in particular. Nonetheless, we need further research on the role activism has played in the conflict itself and therefore to what extent it constitutes ›Ukrainianness‹.

As regards the theoretical differentiation between the civic and ethnic character of markers of belonging (see chapter 2), my analysis reveals a mixed sense of Ukrainian national belonging which has a strong civic side, while at the same time being increasingly founded on a growing ethno-cultural foundation. The Ukrainian language, culture, and historical memory (and ancestry) matter from an ›ethnic perspective‹, and a pro-democratic attitude and activism are important from a ›civic‹ one. This mirrors the general trend of a growing sense of civic ›Ukrainianness‹, which is compatible with a strong ethno-cultural foundation among the Ukrainian population. This can be explained with the politics of belonging of the presidents labeled pro-Ukrainian: Yushchenko (2005–2010), who became president after the ›Orange Revolution‹ in 2004/5, and Poroshenko (2014–2019), who came to power after the Euromaidan and the Donbas conflict's outbreak in 2014 (see chapters 3, 5.3 and 5.5). National belonging, however, also has to be grounded in a ethno-cultural foundation because particularism and ›othering‹ sustain the modern idea of nation-states: although sharing the belief and thus principles of liberal universalism, they are ethno-culturally different from each other (cf. Kuzio 2001: 343f). Typical ethnic markers of belonging, such as ancestry or religion, matter less, which demonstrates the shift in emphasis within ethnic markers of belonging in Ukraine (see chapter 3). At the same time, culture, language, and historical memory have become more inclusive as markers of belonging than ancestry – this corresponds to the growing civic sense of ›Ukrainianness‹ (see chapter 3).

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Overall, Ukrainian belonging can be classified as *inclusive* rather than exclusive as the markers of belonging mentioned, especially the democratic values among them, are open to voluntary and changing belongingness, as opposed to ethnicity (see chapters 2 and 3). This is particularly important for multinational societies like Ukraine: Considering the state's focus on the titular nation's ethno-cultural traits, the inclusiveness of Ukraine's nation-building is of importance for social cohesion so that its citizens do not feel torn between different affiliations to the detriment of their belongingness to Ukraine.

The evolvement of Ukrainian nationalism from its exclusive ethnic roots to more liberal, democratic, and inclusive nationalism therefore seems to have been key (see chapter 3). Thus, Ukrainian national belonging is not necessarily exclusive to other ethnic, religious, or local affiliations. My analysis demonstrates this with regard to the pro-Ukrainian Muslim as well as Russian community in Ukraine. In the case of Muslim Ukrainians, their (partly) pro-Ukrainian attitude has most likely been strengthened by the loss of Crimea and the armed conflict in the Donbas, given their traditional settlement area there. Their pro-Ukrainian attitude can be explained with their strategical preference for living under democratic Ukraine rather than in Russia, which is perceived as undemocratic and as a threat to minorities (see chapters 5.6 and 5.7). In their case, the emphasis on Ukraine's territorial integrity and in particular of the need to deliberate their historical homeland Crimea (and the Donbas) most likely also part of their sense of Ukrainian belonging, as expressed by the Crimean Tatar interviewee in my sample. Further research is needed on whether Ukrainians see Crimea and the Donbas as essential parts of Ukraine, as this relates to the conflict in which Russia claims them to be Russian. The inclusiveness of Ukrainian national belonging towards the Muslim faith is particularly striking, given its minority status in Ukrainian society and the general tensions between Christendom-based societies and their Muslim minorities. At the same time, we can observe official initiatives to integrate Muslims and Crimean Tatars in Ukraine's nation-building, which highlights the inclusiveness of Ukraine as they appear to be aimed at strengthening the Muslim and Crimean Tatar population's sense of belonging to Ukraine. The relevance of these efforts unfolds when we consider that

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Crimea and the Donbas, which stand at the center of Ukraine's current challenges, are their traditional settlement areas.[85] In the case of ethnic Russians, Ukraine's nation-building process seems to have been successful in differentiating between ›our Russians‹ and Russia as the ›other‹, or at least partially, considering that »a trend of re-identification from ethnic Russian toward a Ukrainian national identity« has taken place due to the conflict (Giuliano 2018: 164). This process has been further reinforced by its escalation into Russian war against Ukraine (cf. Bilewicz 2022). But the question arises of how inclusiveness can be created and maintained.

In terms of the inclusion–exclusion duality of national belonging, the interviews demonstrate how markers of belonging do not only define the unifying bond between Ukrainians, but also the distinguishing bond to ›others‹, in particular to Russia, which is historically seen as Ukraine's key ›other‹. Given both countries' historical, cultural, and ethnic commonalities, especially regarding the lasting impact of foreign rule under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and their assimilation politics of Russification, the question arises as to which aspects are suitable to distinguish Ukraine from Russia. The significance of the aforementioned markers of belonging thus lies in their potential to distance Ukraine linguistically, culturally, historically, and politically from Russia, more precisely, so that Ukraine can »extricate itself from Russia and its sphere of interest and leave its ›little Russian‹ status behind […]« (Harris 2020: 607). In this regard, the creation of an antagonistic relationship between Russia and Ukraine is important to legitimize Ukraine's distancing and emancipation from Russia, especially in the face of the armed conflict in the Donbas and its escalation into Russian war against Ukraine in February 2022. The creation and maintenance of national belonging is thereby more likely to be difficult and conflictual when a nation and its constitutive ›other‹ share close ties and the ›other‹ is additionally reluctant to recognize the separateness, authenticity, and independence of the other and seeks

85 This assumption is based on President Zelensky's initiative to integrate Muslim holidays into the state's religious holidays (cf. Daily Sabah 2020), the announcement of the creation of a working group, including Crimean Tatars, to address the problems they are facing (cf. ibid.), and the appointment of a Crimean Tatar Ukrainian to the post of First Deputy Foreign Minister (cf. 112 Ukraine 2020).

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to undermine its separate existence, as in the case of Russian–Ukrainian relations (cf. Kuzio 2001: 361, 343). In this context, Ukraine's commonalities with Russia as well as the regional different perception of Russia among Ukrainians complicate Ukraine's nation-building (cf. Kappeler 2011a: 199). Thus, when national belonging is threatened, its elements, as codifications of symbolic borders, become even more important. With regard to both countries' commonalities, it seems that certain markers of belonging, such as the Ukrainian language, approval of democracy, activism, or an anti-Russian foreign policy orientation, serve to express Ukraine's demarcation and distancing from Russia better than other markers of belonging, such as ancestry or citizenship, considering the different emphasis on each aspect.

The social-constructivist character of Ukrainian belonging unfolds when considering the impact of ›Sovietification‹ politics and the country's current politics of belonging. My analysis shows how the Ukrainian governments have promoted the Ukrainization of the country, in particular of language, culture, and history, as part of the country's nation-building since independence and increasingly since the outbreak of the armed conflict in the Donbas in 2014.

Against this background, I stress that we should understand the armed conflict in the Donbas and its escalation into Russian–Ukrainian war in 2021 not as an internal Ukrainian conflict, but as a conflict between both countries about Ukraine's position in the world: more precisely, about its belonging to versus independence from Russia. This becomes clearer when analyzing Putin's understanding of history (see chapters 1 and 5.7): As Putin believes in the unity of Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians as one people under Russian leadership, while aspiring to resurrect Russia's past imperial and Soviet glory, Ukraine's aspirations to emancipate itself from Russia have inevitably led to confrontation with Russia, as the loss of Crimea to Russia and the escalation of the Donbas conflict into Russian–Ukrainian war suggest. Especially considering Ukraine's past politics of rapprochement with Western alliances, such as the EU and NATO. Russia considers NATO to be its enemy, invading Russian's sphere of interest by attracting Ukraine to join a Western instead of a Russia-led alliance. In the light of a global consensus on the sovereignty of statehood, Russia

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has had to legitimize its intervention in Ukraine by stressing its responsibility to defend itself against a fascist Ukrainian state that threatens its Russian(-speaking) compatriots living in Ukraine as well as Russia itself. Since Ukraine has decided to choose a path that is independent from Russia, the creation and maintenance of its separateness and authenticity has inevitably brought Ukraine into dispute with Russia, especially as Russia is striving to become a regional hegemon (cf. Kuzio 2001: 349).

In this light, the conflict has also contributed to bridging identity cleavages in Ukraine: While Western and Central Ukrainians traditionally strongly express Ukrainian belonging, the opposite is the case for Southern and Eastern Ukrainians (see chapter 3). Among others, Soviet nostalgia and a positive image of Russia have challenged belongingness to Ukraine (cf. ibid.). The positive impact of the Donbas conflict on national belonging in Ukraine becomes apparent with Southern and Eastern Ukrainians' increased self-identification with Ukraine: Whereas the IDPs interviewed stood out with their strong self-identification with Ukraine in spring 2020, self-identification as Ukrainian has also become consensus among Southern and Eastern Ukrainians by now. The clear self-identification as Ukrainian among most of the IDPs interviewed seems to reveal how the armed conflict has strengthened the relationship to Ukraine of those most affected by the conflict, even though Southern and Eastern Ukrainians are said to have a traditionally weak affiliation to Ukraine. Therefore, the conflict itself serves as a unifying force, bridging the cleavages in society by bonding Ukrainians in the face of the armed conflict, which is seen as an external attack on their country. This can be explained with the history of Ukrainian belonging: Although the idea has historically been contested by Russia, it seems that Ukrainians increasingly view Russia as a threat to their nation(-state) (see chapter 5.6 on democracy). However, the question arises of how persistent the strengthening of national belonging will be, especially in the South and East, once the war is over and normality returns.

Overall, my analysis demonstrates how belonging has to be understood as the intertwining of commonality, attachments, and mutuality. While commonalities indicate what makes people feel belonging to each other, attachments are the (im)material manifestation of the bond felt between humans, and mutuality is their ›glue‹ as it evokes and expects loyalty and

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commitment (see chapter 2). The Ukrainian language and culture, historical narratives, but more the belief in democracy are the *commonalities* that make Ukrainians feel Ukrainian and that they belong together to Ukraine. The idea of Ukraine as one's ›homeland‹, an inclusive understanding of citizenship, and civil and political rights are the *attachments* which make commonalities visible to others. Activism as well as the belief in democratic principles establish the *mutuality* needed. In this context, my analysis shows how belonging is both *formal* (e. g. an emphasis on citizenship or Ukrainian as the official state language) and *informal* (e. g. activism) in its character (see chapter 2). In addition, my analysis points out how belonging consists, among other things, of *emotions* (e. g. stating that one loves Ukraine or feels Ukrainian, not wanting to flee from Ukraine), of *social and cultural practices* (e. g. wearing traditional clothing, personal language use), of *narratives* (e. g. historical memory), and *symbols* (e. g. the flag). Belonging is moreover both an act of *self-identification* as well as of *identification by others* (ibid.), as is demonstrated by my interviewees, who identify themselves as Ukrainian and concurrently use common nationality labels for them and others, like Russians. The interviewees repeatedly stress their subjective conviction that they belong to the Ukrainian nation: Exemplarily, the interviewees consider themselves ›Ukrainians‹ or ›Ukrainians citizens‹, ›nationalists‹, ›patriots‹, or ›pro-Ukrainian activists‹ and call Ukraine their ›home‹.

Belonging is felt individually but is negotiated and performed collectively (see chapter 2). Performing belonging, which can also be understood by the theoretical concept of *doing identity*, becomes apparent as the relevance of many markers of belonging lies in their potential to demonstrate loyalty to Ukraine and concurrently distance to Russia, whose relevance increases because of their visibility: by speaking Ukrainian, wearing the Ukrainian traditional clothing vyshyvanka, volunteering in the conflict, and staying in Ukraine instead of fleeing to other countries, especially not Russia[86]. Hence, I argue that the significance of markers of Ukrainian

86 The issue of staying in Ukraine was addressed several times by different interviewees, most prominently by the ethnic Russian interviewee, but only fleetingly, which is why I did not dedicate an entire section to this facet of ›Ukrainianness‹.

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belonging is linked to their visibility as practical means with which to display belongingness to Ukraine—and concurrently difference, distance, and emancipation from Russia. Considering that forging commonality (and mutuality) is a difficult issue, especially with increasing global migration, the concept of belonging stresses focusing on the creation of belonging (see chapter 2). This applies in particular to the state's politics of belonging, as an example of the negotiating character of ›Ukrainianness‹, which underpins the social-constructivist perspective on the social phenomenon of interest. Lastly, my analysis demonstrates the situatedness, variability, diversity, and complexity of national belonging.

Although theoretical saturation, an important quality criterion of Grounded Theory, could not be reached (see chapter 4.4.3), these findings give an important insight into how national belonging is not objectively given, but develops as a social construct and how this process is characterized by preservation, change, as well as controversy. This becomes most prominent in the interwovenness between the individuals' sense of belonging to Ukraine, as manifested in the relevance of the variety of the markers of belonging discussed, and the state's nation-building. The partial convergence between Ukraine's recent nation-building policies and the interviewees' national belonging demonstrates how domestic and foreign politics, for example, concerning language, culture, historical memory, or foreign policy, shape national belonging in Ukraine. In this context, my analysis demonstrates how nation-building in Ukraine serves to emancipate it from the its Soviet past and Russia and how it impacts Ukrainian belonging. Lastly, the interviews illustrate how national belonging, and thus ethnicity and nationality, are not objective facts, but are interactively (re)produced specific worldviews and how institutions as well as individuals contribute to shaping it.

Consequently, to reach theoretical saturation, a future qualitative study should, firstly, be based on broader data material which focuses, among other ideas, on diversity within the sample (e. g. age, location, language, religious and ethnic minorities, pro-Russian sentiments, political commitment, etc.), as the findings here only represent a certain snapshot of ›Ukrainianness‹, in particular of politically active Ukrainians. Secondly, a future study should not only focus on exclusion, but also on the (con-

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struction of) inclusiveness of Ukrainian national belonging and, thus, illuminate its multiplicity and compatibility with regard to other ethnic, religious, and local affiliations. In this context, it is also necessary to focus on how the country's current challenges have impacted Ukrainian nationalism and how the Ukrainian nationalist movement, in particular its far-right branch, influences Ukrainian national belonging. Thirdly, a comparative focus, contrasting internally with externally displaced Ukrainians, especially in Russia, would further sharpen the focus on the construction of national belonging in Ukraine, particularly with regard to the influence of the armed conflict on those most affected by it. In this context, the inclusion of DNR and LNR citizens would further contribute to the research, but access to this target group is very restricted. Fourthly, a broader regional focus, independent of the factor of being an IDP, would further contribute to examining the impact of the conflict on (regionally varying notions of) national belonging in Ukraine, especially with regard to its impact on either bridging or deepening the identity cleavages in Ukraine. Fifthly, a multi-perspective view would be of benefit, considering the interwovenness between an individual sense of belonging to Ukraine and the societal level, in particular to intensify the view of how institutions (e. g. the state's nation-building, (social) media, propaganda) as well as individuals reciprocally contribute to shaping national belonging in Ukraine. At the same time, further research should focus more on the link between culture, the belief in democracy, activism, local affiliations, and Soviet nostalgia because these aspects seem to have been explored less so far, compared to other markers of belonging such as language. In this regard, a mixed-methods approach would sharpen the focus. Sixthly, a multi-generational approach would also contribute to honing the view of the emergence process of national belonging in order to examine, among other ideas, the influence of biographical turning points or of one's family history on national belonging. Finally, in view of Ukraine's relations with Russia, it is necessary to focus more on the tensions within the population. Against the backdrop of Ukraine's long history of foreign domination, a postcolonial perspective could round out an examination of the fragmentation and fragility of Ukrainian national belonging: Although we do not see Russia as a classical colonial power, Russia‹ dominance over

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other regions in the Russian Empire and the USSR was strong in terms of the economy, politics and especially culture. Given the developments after the collapse of the USSR, a comparative study would also be of benefit. For example, regarding Belarus, where protests in 2020/21 indicated that national belonging seems to be undergoing a readjustment. Although the protests in Belarus were directed against the president and, in contrast to Ukraine, do not aim at further emancipating the country from Russia, especially by aspiring to a future alongside the EU, the Belarus' national belonging could be at stake soon—especially considering the criticism of the president as an effort to break with his project of continuing the USSR in a miniature version, either alone or with Russia. Both countries' further development, especially with regard to democratization and the strengthening of civil society, challenge Russia's plans for ›Eastern Slavic unity‹ as well as its political system in the sense of possible dissemination of these tendencies to Russia.

To conclude, whereas Putin still clings to the belief in ›Eastern Slavic unity‹ between Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians and seeks to maintain this by all means, it was most likely Russia's role behind the scenes in the loss of Crimea and the Donbas and its active part in the current war which have strengthened social cohesion among the Ukrainian population, especially in the South and East, and, thus, have further contributed to Ukraine turning away from Russia. My analysis demonstrates how certain issues have become a consensus among the Ukrainian population, although having previously been highly disputed. Hence, as long as Ukrainian–Russian relations remain asymmetric, Russia will be an important factor in Ukraine's nation-building, as the impact of Ukraine's current challenges demonstrates—and vice versa.

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