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'A Decolonising Moment of Sorts': The Baltic States' Vicarious Identification with Ukraine and Related Domestic and Foreign Policy Developments

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Abstract

In a recent essay on the war in Ukraine in The Journal of Genocide Research, Maria Mälksoo argues that the ongoing war in Ukraine has become a 'decolonising moment of sorts' as Central and Eastern European states have started taking the 'moral and practical lead' in supporting Ukraine and thus asserting their own agency. Following this line of argumentation, this paper will explore the Baltic states' vicarious identification with Ukraine, identifying multiple ways in which these actors have initiated policies to support Ukraine internationally and the ways in which solidarity with Ukraine have been received by various domestic constituencies, including ethnic minorities. By vicariously identifying with Ukraine, the Baltic states have continued their transformation from 'policy-takers' to 'policy-makers' in the European security landscape. This transformation can be traced back to 2004, when they joined the transatlantic community and the European Union. At the same time, similarly to

the 2013–2014 crisis in Ukraine, the trauma of the war has become an engine of new discourses and new divisions within the Baltic states, prompting societal debates about the legacy of the Soviet Union associated with Russia (including the fate of monuments to Soviet soldiers) and the relationship with Russian culture.

***Keywords**: decolonisation, memory politics, trauma, Baltic states, Ukraine, Russia's war in Ukraine*

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Introduction

In her recent article 'The Postcolonial Moment in Russia's war against Ukraine' Maria Mälksoo wrote about 'a multilayered postcolonial moment constituted by Russia's war against Ukraine' (Mälksoo 2022). For the states in Central and Eastern Europe, most of which turned out to be passionate supporters of Ukraine, the full-scale war in Ukraine became a 'decolonizing moment of sorts' (Mälksoo 2022) when these states asserted their own political agency and became important players in the European security landscape. In the context of the war in Ukraine, 'decolonisation' of Central and Eastern Europe became associated not only with resistance to Russia, but also the assertion of agency by the local actors (Central and Eastern European states). There were major changes not only in the foreign policy behaviour of these actors, but also in their identities.

The goal of this paper is to analyse the ways in which this 'decolonising moment of sorts' was experienced by some of the most passionate supporters of Ukraine—the Baltic states, and the ways in which this 'critical situation' has resulted in new forms of identification and new discourses. I argue that the Baltic states have experienced 'vicarious identification' ('living through the other')—the emergence of a shared identity with Ukraine and waging war with Russia at home. As noted by Browning, Joenniemi and Steele (2021), vicarious identification is linked to the traumas of the past, and it has major foreign policy implications as the states create shared identities.

This concept is rooted in psychology, and it is about the situations when people adopt identities and stories of others as their own, making them part of their lives. Rachel Dolezal's story told in the book by Browning, Joenniemi and Steele (2021) explains this concept well. Born into a family of white parents in the United States and having experienced abuse when growing up, Rachel dealt with her trauma by adopting the identity of an African American and became a civil rights activist in the African American community. She was 'outed' by her white parents, and this scandal triggered a debate in the US about race and the social construction of race.

Browning, Joenniemi and Steele (2021) argue that not only individuals, but also states can experience vicarious identification. States can vicariously identify with other states, and this happens when states are trying to establish self-esteem and pride. Often the processes of vicarious identification are inseparable from trauma and feelings of ontological insecurity—situations when the biographical narratives of states are threatened or disrupted. When states experience ontological insecurity, they are drawn to the subjects that give them a sense of self-esteem. The perceived qualities of the subject include desirable qualities, such as courage and leadership (Browning, Joenniemi & Steele 2021: 46).

It is important to stress that vicarious identification is a complex process toward the making of vicarious identity ('living through the other'). The practices within this process involve 'a fundamental downgrading of difference in favour of similarity with the target of vicarious identification' (Browning, Joenniemi & Steele 2021: 49). Actors undergoing the process of vicarious identification look for similarities with the target of identification. In addition, the process of vicarious identification involves practices of securitisation and enemy othering. Potentially, it can make the existing self-narratives stronger, thus contributing to the sense of stability and biographical continuity (Browning, Joenniemi & Steele 2021: 70).

This essay is divided into four parts. After briefly reviewing the relations between Ukraine and the Baltic states in the past (prior to 2022) in the first part, I continue with an analysis of the processes associated with the vicarious identification experienced by the Baltic states in the second part. The process of establishing a vicarious identity goes beyond feelings of 'identifying with' or 'friendship'. It requires 'living through' or close identification with experiences. 'Living through' can be detected from intense actions of solidarity, public discourses and other expressions of 'we-ness'. Vicarious identification with Ukraine has been accompanied by the foreign policy activism of the Baltic states, who have been fighting for Ukraine in international organisations. The third part explores the reasons behind vicarious identification—the traumas of the past and related ontological insecurities that have contributed to this phenomenon. The fourth part addresses the ways of getting rid of past legacies associated with the Soviet Union, and, by extension, Russia—attempts at desovietisation, getting rid of Soviet era monuments and Russian culture. Vicarious identification is never absolute, and various groups may resist it. Thus, this part analyses the acts of resistance and internal divisions that were revealed during 'the decolonising moment of sorts'. I conclude by exploring the broader significance of this case study for the processes of decolonisation in Eastern and Central Europe.

Friendship and cooperation: Baltic-Ukrainian relations prior to 2022

In recent memory, it is possible to trace Baltic-Ukrainian cooperation to the time of perestroika, when societal activists supported independence movements—the Ukrainians in the Baltic states, and representatives from the Baltic states in Ukraine. One of the iconic images celebrating Lithuanian-Ukrainian unity is from 1991 when Ukrainians came to Lithuania to support its fight for independence on 13 January 1991, when Lithuanian independence was endangered by a military assault by the USSR.

Picture 1[1]

The documentary *UA LT For Your and Our Freedom* released in 2021 traces Lithuanian-Ukrainian cooperation back to the time when Ukraine was part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (ca. 1250–1795) (Makarenko 2021). In addition, it portrays Lithuania and Ukraine as being united in a common struggle against the Soviet Union for more than 70 years.

In reality, since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states and Ukraine have chosen different paths. From the beginning, the Baltic states chose a strong transatlantic orientation which was preserved even when politicians associated with the former Communists came to power. Although Ukraine demonstrated interest and resolve in becoming independent when the Soviet Union was

1 Source: https://twitter.com/Lithuania/status/1497605967688650757/photo/1

breaking apart, its transformation was prolonged and difficult, and its transatlantic orientation became evident only after Euromaidan in 2013. In contrast, the Baltic states demonstrated a strong desire to be treated as part of the 'West', not as part of the 'post-Soviet' sphere, from the nineties until 2004 (when they joined NATO and the EU). Their identity discourses were focused on 'the return to Europe', being a 'Nordic' state (in the case of Estonia), and were definitely not linked to 'sister republics' such as Ukraine in the former USSR.

Trying to be 'good Europeans' and useful members of the transatlantic alliance, in 2003 the Baltic states turned their gaze to Ukraine when they promised to help to develop a common European policy toward Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. The Baltic states used the EU's ENP (European Neighbourhood Policy) to engage with Ukraine and other former Soviet republics in the western part of Newly Independent States (NIS). The Baltic states tried to actively participate in the planning processes of the EU 'new neighbours' initiative, and their main hope was that engaging with neighbours in the former USSR would help to them move away from the European periphery and establish themselves as policy makers, not policy takers. The three Baltic states stressed the link between security and democracy in the NIS (including Ukraine). Lithuania went one step further, arguing for an 'open door' policy to NATO and the EU for the states in the NIS, especially Ukraine (Galbreath 2006: 116).

Although there were ups and downs in the Baltic states' relationship with Russia, it was still considered to be a threat, and insecurities about Russia became a reason why the Baltic states, together with other states in the so-called 'new' Europe, expressed support for the United States when it decided to invade Iraq. This was the point when the Baltic states, together with other Eastern Central European states, experienced the dilemma of 'dual loyalty' (since there was disagreement between the US, France and Germany over the invasion). Increased activism in the former USSR (including Ukraine) was a way to please both the US and its European partners. This foreign policy orientation was especially pronounced in Lithuania, which during the second term of President Valdas Adamkus (2004–09) was striving to be a regional leader and a bridge-builder between the East and the West. An explanation of this policy was presented by Raimundas Lopata, Lithuania's leading political scientist, who argued that the dilemma of dual loyalty would be resolved if Lithuania managed to escape the Eastern (read: Russian) sphere of influence. Lithuania should try to transform the security landscape to make sure that future Munich-like agreements are impossible. Its emergence as a regional centre promoting the common interests of NATO and the EU, which includes democracy promotion in Ukraine and Belarus, would contribute to the creation of such a security environment (Lopata 2003).

Thus, since 2003, Ukraine became an important part of Lithuania's foreign policy (probably more so than in Latvia and Estonia). There was an attempt to deviate from the 'eastern orientation' when Dalia Grybauskaitė became Lithuania's president in 2009 and notoriously wanted to re-orient Lithuania's foreign policy away from 'the beggars in the East' to the partners in the West; however, it soon became clear that the 'partners in the West' expected and appreciated the active role of the Baltic states in the Eastern Partnership. Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, became the place where the Third Eastern Partnership summit of the European Union took place in November 2013. Yanukovych's refusal to sign an Association Agreement with the EU at this summit was the trigger for the Euromaidan protests.

This brief overview of developments since the disintegration of the Soviet Union until the 'crisis in Ukraine' in 2013–14 suggests that during this time the relationship between the Baltic states and Ukraine was not one of equals. Ukraine was seen as belonging to the post-Soviet zone, unsure whether it wanted to join the transatlantic community and in need of help and assistance. In contrast, the Baltic states saw themselves as firmly rooted in the 'West'—their transatlantic orientation was not really in doubt since the disintegration of the Soviet Union—and, by and large, the 'West' was seen as more 'developed' and progressive than the 'East'.

More than friendship: The Baltic states' vicarious identification with Ukraine

The 2013–14 crisis in Ukraine brought the Baltic states and Ukraine closer together, and this 'critical situation' can be considered as the first step toward the 'vicarious identification' that became especially pronounced in 2022. The Baltic states reacted very sensitively to the occupation of the Crimea and the invasion of eastern Ukraine by Russia. There was a widespread feeling, despite membership in the transatlantic community that 'we could be next'. This feeling of 'uncertain sovereignty' (Klumbytė 2019) was strengthened by Russia's increased military activity in the Baltic sea region—the presence of Russian warships, Russian airplanes flying with transponders switched off, and increased levels of informational warfare (Kasekamp 2018: 61). The response of the Baltic states to the aggressive actions of Russia in Ukraine included a call for immediate EU sanctions (which have financially hurt the Baltic states themselves), increased defence budgets, the reintroduction of conscription (in Lithuania) and 'renewed enthusiasm for self-defence among the populations' (Kasekamp 2018: 67). Lithuania became the first EU country to provide lethal aid to Ukraine. It appears that the 2013–14 crisis changed the discourse about Ukraine as well: the Lithuanian foreign minister started describing Lithuania

as having 'brotherly' relations with Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Lithuania 2017).

The feeling of 'uncertain sovereignty' (Klumbytė 2019) became even more acute after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The perception of sovereignty as 'recurring and temporary', as something that can be taken away suddenly (Klumbytė 2022) became part of the process of identification felt by the Baltic states toward Ukraine. The Baltic states have become the leading voices in Europe supporting Ukraine, arguing for fast-track EU and NATO membership and supporting Ukraine with what it needs most—weapons and other types of aid. Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine has become Lithuania's, Latvia's and Estonia's war.

Immediately after the war broke out, many in the Baltic states started demanding more direct and aggressive NATO engagement in the war. Even though NATO refused to provide the no-fly-zone requested by Ukraine and the Baltic states, arguing that this would lead to escalation and potentially start a direct war with Russia, the Baltic states nevertheless continued to support Ukraine in every way possible—politically, economically and militarily—sending massive amounts of humanitarian aid, taking Ukrainian refugees into their homes, forming cyber-brigades to help Ukraine fight Russian disinformation and cutting off economic ties with Russia. As indicated by the Ukraine Support Tracker developed by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, the governments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have been the most generous donors to Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale war in 2022, with their donations exceeding 0.75% of their GDP (Kiel Institute for the World Economy n.d.). There has been a strong feeling that Ukraine is fighting for the democracy and security of the Baltic states; thus, there was a willingness to provide military aid—even in weaponry that was seen as essential for the defence of the Baltic states themselves.

The outpouring of help for Ukraine was accompanied by intense foreign policy activism by the Baltic states. The Baltic states were among the most active countries pushing for far-reaching sanctions against Russia. As early as April 2022, the presidents of the three Baltic states travelled to Kyiv, leading an important diplomatic initiative to help Ukraine. (At that time, the leaders of other states were still unwilling to travel to Kyiv because it was considered to be too dangerous (Hartwell et al. 2022: 7).) They have served as a loud 'moral voice for Ukraine' (Tůma 2022), arguing for the faster integration of Ukraine into European and transatlantic communities. They have pushed other states, such as Germany, to send more weapons, including tanks, to Ukraine. When this initiative was successful, the Baltic states felt that their voice had finally been heard (Golubeva & Harris 2023). Through their identification with Ukraine, the

Baltic states have increased their self-esteem and international status. For the first time, the EU started treating them as full and respected members, listening to their voice, and taking their suggestions regarding Ukraine into account (de Gruyter 2022).

Admittedly, being listened to does not always mean that the solutions proposed by the Baltic states in support of Ukraine will be implemented. Prior to the NATO summit in Vilnius in July 2023, the governments of the Baltic states together with other states in Central Eastern Europe pushed for concrete promises to take Ukraine into NATO as soon as possible (Ryan & Rauhala 2023). Given the resistance from Germany and the United States, no such promises were given to Ukraine. Nevertheless, holding the summit in Lithuania was an acknowledgment that Eastern Europe is increasingly important for the alliance—even though the most important decisions were heavily influenced by the big and powerful players.

Baltic societies have also consistently demonstrated enthusiastic support for Ukraine, and this support has not been eroded as the war continues. In 2022, the Lithuanian public donated enough money to buy a large drone for the Ukrainian military in a matter of days. In 2023, 2 million euros for radars was donated in just one hour (and 14 million euros was donated in one month). Individuals and families accepted thousands of refugees into their homes. This openness to refugees from Ukraine was in sharp contrast to the recent response in Latvia and Lithuania to refugees from Middle Eastern countries fleeing through Belarus. The two countries saw the influx of these refugees as 'hybrid warfare', and refused to accept them (Henley, Roth & Rankin 2021).

The support for Ukraine coming from the Baltic states has been more than an expression of sympathy and friendship; the Baltic states started experiencing vicarious identification with Ukraine. In some respects, this emotional identification felt by the Baltic states was even stronger than expressions of support in other Central Eastern European states, such as Poland.[2] As argued by Browning, Joenniemi and Steele, focusing on vicarious identification means detecting instances when 'vicarious experiences that otherwise have been narrated in the third person are actually relayed via first person pronouns' (Browning, Joenniemi & Steele 2021: 81). In addition, in the words of the authors, 'vicarious identification may also be evident in how such narratives demonstrate a height-

2 In the beginning of the war, Poland presented itself as a passionate supporter of Ukraine, willing to take massive flows of refugees and extending different types of aid, including military aid. However, in spring 2023, together with Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, Poland imposed an embargo on Ukrainian grain trying to protect its own markets. In September 2023, Poland asked the European Union for the embargo of the Ukrainian grain beyond the September deadline to protect the Polish farmers. This action demonstrates the limits of Poland's support for Ukraine and desire to look out for its own interests (Associated Press 2023).

ened level of commitment to a specific relationship, establish a sense of historical commonality, blur the distinction between self and other, potentially even appropriating elements of the target's historical experience for oneself, and not least emphasize familial relations' (Browning, Joenniemi & Steele 2021: 82).

The Baltic leaders in their statements about Ukraine have expressed feelings of 'we-ness' and shared identity (Estonian World 2023) as well as shared history (in the case of Lithuania, the Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, which included Ukraine (President.pl 2023)). Ukraine's fight has become associated with freedom, justice and democracy as well as the future of the Baltic states (as well as the future of Europe and the entire world order). This process of vicarious identification with Ukraine which started in 2013–14 revealed a different attitude by the Baltic states toward Ukraine—instead of seeing Ukraine as a policy taker, as a recipient of help, as a place for democracy export, Ukraine suddenly became a courageous defender of democracy, the courage of which should be respected and emulated. It became seen as sharing the same commitment to freedom and international law that is essential for the survival of small states.

Thus, for example, when increasing Estonia's military support for Ukraine to more than 1% of Estonia's GDP, or to more than 370 million euros in January 2023, Kaja Kallas, Estonia's PM, argued: 'If Ukraine fell, freedom would also be in danger in other parts of the world. By helping Ukraine to defend its independence, we are defending the right to freedom and democracy of all countries, including Estonia'(Estonian World 2023). In January 2023, arguing that Ukraine is essential for the European security architecture, Jonatan Vseviov, the secretary general of Estonia's Foreign Ministry expressed the sense of 'we-ness' in this way: 'Ukraine's victory is the security guarantee of all of Europe: it determines the fate of not just Ukraine, but the future of Europe's security architecture' (Estonian World 2023). Similar sentiments were expressed by Estonia's president Alar Karis: 'We must understand that Russia's war of aggression doesn't just jeopardise Ukraine, it jeopardises all of Europe. Your war is also our war' (Estonian World 2023).

The sense of 'we-ness' became embedded in the symbols of state institutions and even private businesses that started using the Ukrainian flag instead of the Lithuanian, Latvian or Estonian flags. State institutions started displaying the Ukrainian flag next to the national flag (My Government 2022). Furthermore, the Baltic states began to issue euro coins expressing support for Ukraine. Estonia issued a two-euro coin with the inscription *Slava Ukraini*, 'Glory to Ukraine' and Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said that this will be a 'daily reminder of Ukraine's fight for freedom and its future in the EU' (Euronews 2022). Lithuania created a similar two-euro coin (together with Ukraine) and a special ten-euro coin to support Ukraine.

Picture 2[3]

The impact of trauma and ontological insecurities: Why vicarious identification?

As recounted by Browning, Joenniemi and Steele, previous experiences of trauma and ontological insecurities are the reasons behind vicarious identification (Browning, Joenniemi & Steele 2021: 32). In the case of the Baltic-Ukrainian relationship, previous experiences of collective trauma play a major role in memory politics and, by extension, in the creation of the biographical narratives of states, which are used to communicate with other states and find meaning in such interactions. In the case of the Baltic states, one of the most lasting collective traumas was the experience of deportations and repression under Stalin. In Lithuania, this experience is called 'genocide', and after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it was commemorated as such. The framing of the Soviet experience as a major collective trauma in the Baltic states is also linked to ontological insecurities and memory wars. Some scholars have interpreted attempts to equate crimes under Stalin with the Holocaust as an attempt to avoid responsibility for complicity in the Holocaust (Subotić 2019)

In the case of Ukraine, the Holodomor has become the Ukrainian collective trauma, especially since the memory policies instituted by President Yushchenko, who started referring to the Holodomor as genocide (Reuters 2008). The Baltic states were some of the first states to recognise the Holodomor as genocide (shortly after this was done by the Ukrainian Parliament in 2006). During the commemoration of the ninetieth anniversary of the Holodomor in 2022, Baltic politicians established a connection between the past and the future, making

3 Source: https://www.eestipank.ee/en/press/coin-card-featuring-two-euro-coin-ukraine-goes-sale-05072022

a case that Russia committed genocide in the past, and is currently committing genocide against Ukraine as well (Gitanas Nausėda 2022; Kaja Kallas 2022). The collective traumas of the past have become especially pertinent in the present, and have contributed to the processes of vicarious identification.

The anti-Soviet resistance in the Baltic states, which began during the second Soviet occupation in 1944 and continued after World War II, became another important frame of reference, especially in Lithuania where this resistance was especially fierce. Anti-Soviet resistance was remembered publicly during perestroika in the late eighties and after independence in the early nineties, even though the focus was on the deportations under Stalin, because many of those who were repressed and deported were members of the anti-Soviet resistance or were related to them. After the 2013–14 crisis in Ukraine, the collective memory associated with anti-Soviet partisan resistance became even more pronounced, as societies in the Baltic states were preparing for irregular warfare in case of a Russian invasion.

In Ukraine, memory of the anti-Soviet resistance fighters became publicly visible during perestroika; however, the country was divided over it. The anti-Soviet fighters were commemorated in western Ukraine, and the Great Patriotic War was commemorated in eastern and central Ukraine. In 2004, when Russia forcefully intervened in Ukraine's domestic politics by supporting Viktor Yanukovych, and the Orange Revolution that followed this intervention, Ukraine's memory politics changed dramatically. As noted earlier, President Yushchenko started referring to the Holodomor as genocide. In addition, in 2007, Yushchenko gave the Hero of Ukraine title to Roman Shukhevych, a UPA (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a Ukrainian paramilitary and partisan entity) commander, and in 2010 he gave the same title to Stepan Bandera, one of the early leaders of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, a Ukrainian political movement active from 1929 to around 1991 that was dedicated to the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state. The cult of anti-Soviet fighters became especially strong during the Euromaidan protests.

Thus, since the 2013–14 crisis, both the Baltic states and Ukraine have developed similar 'fighting and suffering' memory regimes, condemning Soviet crimes as genocide (especially in the case of Lithuania) and expressing respect and admiration for anti-Soviet resistance fighters. There has been institutional cooperation in memory making. For example, Lithuania's Genocide Research and Resistance Centre, a memory institution, has cooperated with the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance created under Yushchenko. The National Holodomor Museum in Ukraine has cooperated with the Baltic states and Poland (Holodomor Museum 2022). The similarity of the collective narratives constructed by the Baltic states and Ukraine explains why it became easier for

the Baltic states to fully adopt Ukraine's war trauma. At the same time, these 'fighting and suffering' regimes became the loci of memory wars and ontological insecurities (Davoliūtė 2017).

Desovietisation, derussification and the internal lines of division

The processes of vicarious identification in the Baltic states have included attempts by the governments and societies to completely sever all links with the Soviet past and even with Russian culture. A movement to get rid of all Soviet-era monuments and other tangible memories has started. In August 2022, in Latvia, the Monument to the Liberators in Riga—a site of memory associated with the glorification of the 'Great Patriotic War' in Soviet Latvia—was demolished. Latvia's Parliament voted in favour of this demolition in May 2022, three months after the start of full-scale war in Ukraine (RFE/RL 2022a).

For years, this monument served as one of the most important places of memory for Latvia's Russians. Their commemorative ceremonies held on 9 May, the Day of Victory of the Great Patriotic War, was held in the vicinity of this monument. These celebrations were linked to Putin's rise in power and pride in Russia's victory during World War II (Kaprāns 2022). In early 2022, when Russia's war of aggression started, the monument became a symbol of Russian aggression. In April, Sandra Kalniete, a famous politician in Latvia and one of the supporters of the harsh treatments for Soviet crimes, argued that the monument should be dismantled. Her tweet had enormous political support (Kaprāns 2022). This decommunisation process has not been accompanied with political violence. The ideological fragmentation of Latvia's Russians is identified as one of the reasons why there was no widespread resistance by Latvia's Russians to the removal of this monument, which was so important for many of Latvia's Russians (Kaprāns 2022). At the same time, it appears that there was little public tolerance for those who argued against the demolition of Soviet era monuments in Latvia (Kaprāns 2022).

Similar processes in memory politics took place in Estonia and Lithuania as many Soviet era monuments were removed. All Soviet era monuments were pronounced as 'glorifying the Russian occupation' and had to be removed from public spaces (BBC 2022). In Narva, a city with a large Russian population, an iconic T-34 tank was removed and brought to the Estonian War Museum (BBC 2022). Public order and internal security were identified as the reasons for the removal of the monuments. Unlike in 2007, when the relocation of the 'Bronze soldier', a monument to the Soviet 'liberators', from the centre of Tallinn to a military cemetery caused civil unrest and dissatisfaction among Estonia's Russians, reaction to the removal of Soviet era monuments in 2022 was subdued. There was some resistance to the removal of the monuments, and it came from those who study memory politics. For example, Marek Tamm, a leading cultural historian,

argued against decisions that are made by 'anonymous commissions' in a hasty way. He felt that it is important that the future generation has an understanding about the Soviet past, and it is connected to the monuments. Tamm described the securitisation of memory associated with the removal of the monuments as an undesirable development (Tamelytė 2022).

Similar developments—the removal of Soviet-era monuments—as well as debates about the removals took place in Lithuania as well. The removal of monuments got support from some politicians and government agencies, but it has been resisted by leading memory politics experts (Bakaitė 2022). When the full--scale invasion began, politicians expressed a desire to remove the monuments in one month (before the 9 May celebration), but the leading memory politics experts warned that war may be the worst time to remove the monuments because they would endanger societal harmony and possibly promote polarisation. There were many related problems, such as dilemmas about what to do with monuments not only from World War II, but also from World War I that are found in Lithuania (Bakaitė 2022). Despite this resistance, the movement to remove Soviet era monuments, especially those associated with the 'Great Patriotic War', continued. Most debates were focused on the removal of a monument to Soviet soldiers in a cemetery in Antakalnis (Vilnius). The statues were a place of gathering for those who were longing for the Soviet past on 9 May. The decision to remove the monument was even challenged by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which received a petition from several people identifying themselves as 'ethnic Russians'. The Interior Ministry and the municipality reacted to the UNHRC injunction by arguing that it was 'misled' by the petitioners, and that no desecration of the monument and no reburial of soldiers' remains will take place (BNS 2022).

In Lithuania, in addition to the removal of the Soviet monuments, another move toward desovietisation was made. In December 2022, the Lithuanian Parliament passed a law, which came into effect in May 2023, that forbids the 'promotion' of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes and their ideologies. 'Public objects' that are recognised as promoting such ideologies have to be removed from the public space (Teisės aktų registras 2022). According to Bronė Kuzmickienė, an MP from the conservative Homeland Union party who initiated this legislation, it is 'essential' to recognise and remove the remnants of totalitarian regimes because of what is going on in Ukraine now. She argued that it was also essential to understand who a 'collaborator' is in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine (Skėrytė 2022).

In addition, since the beginning of the invasion, in the Baltic states (similarly to Ukraine) public discussions about how to relate to Russian culture, including its classics, have been taking place. Some have argued that there is a clear

link between Russian expansionism and Russian culture; thus, the 'correct' moral position given the war in Ukraine is to resist all expressions of Russian culture (Jakučiūnas 2022). Simonas Kairys, Lithuania's culture minister, argued that a 'mental quarantine' and separation from all Russian art during the war would be useful. In his eyes, the war presented an opportunity for the Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine not only to cooperate in war, but also in culture (Šilobritas 2023).

In Vilnius, the name of the Russian Drama Theater was changed to the Old Vilnius Theater and a school in Kaunas which was named after Alexander Pushkin was renamed. Kristina Sabaliauskaitė, a famous writer, responded to criticism by Georgy Yefremov, a well-known public figure, over changing the name of the Russian Drama Theater by forcefully arguing in support of the decision to rename the theatre. In the eyes of Sabaliauskaitė, it meant going back to the roots of the theatre (which was named 'Russian' by the Soviet occupiers who brought nothing but suffering to the theatre community). Sabaliauskaitė argued that the Russian Drama Theater was an instrument of a colonial power, and it was time to get rid of it (Sabaliauskaitė 2022). The leadership of the renamed theatre got rid of most plays written by Russian playwrights; however, reportedly, in February 2023, several plays written by contemporary Russian playwrights were still shown, and this fact was criticised by the national media. (Martišiūtė 2023).

The wave of getting rid of Soviet era monuments and Russian cultural influence received both governmental and popular support in the Baltic states and only relatively weak resistance from some intellectuals. It may be interpreted as an expression of vicarious identification with Ukraine—the war against the aggressor was being fought at home against symbols of the Soviet Union that continued to be supported by Russia. This move to get rid of the Soviet past reinforced the established narratives of fighting and suffering, and it can be interpreted as a continuation of the 'anti-colonial nationalist politics of memory' (Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk 2019) that intensified in Ukraine and the Baltic states after the 2013–14 crisis in Ukraine.

At the same time, the processes associated with vicarious identification with Ukraine may have affected attitudes toward minorities in the Baltic states. Latvia and Estonia are both home to a large ethnic Russian minority and Lithuania is home to smaller ethnic Polish and Russian minorities. The members of these minority communities have been suspected in the past of 'dual loyalty'—harbouring some sympathies toward Russia and embracing a more positive view of the Soviet past.[4] Even in Lithuania, which (unlike Latvia and Estonia) granted

4 In 2021, 6.53% of Lithuania's population identify themselves as ethnic Poles, and 5% as ethnic Russians (Official Statistics Portal n.d.). The ethnic Polish minority has been traditionally more politically active than the ethnic Russian minority. In 2022, 26.3% of Latvia's residents identified themselves as Russians (Oficiālās statistikas portāls

citizenship to all residents in 1991, the full-scale war in Ukraine has changed ethnic relations. According to the results of a public opinion survey conducted by the Diversity Development Group, 23.1% of respondents would not like to rent housing to ethnic Russians (compared with 10% in 2021), and 13.6% would not like to work with ethnic Russians in the same firm (compared with 5% in 2021) (LSTC etninių tyrimų institutas 2021; Blažytė 2022). Moreover, 74.6% of respondents indicated that during the last five years their attitudes toward Russians have deteriorated (Blažytė 2022).

Commenting on the results of this public opinion survey, Andžėjus Pukšto (Andrzej Pukszto), a prominent Lithuanian political scientist and commentator, argued persuasively that 'people are tempted to look for a guilty party somewhere where they live' (that is to say, blame Russian speaking minorities for support for Putin) even though it was clear that Russia should be treated as the main aggressor (Zverko 2022). He pointed out that it is important to separate support for Putin from ethnic identity. Support for Putin can be found not only among Russian speaking minorities, but also among ethnic Lithuanians, Latvians, Poles and others in the region (Zverko 2022).

Although it is impossible to generalise about the reaction of Russian-speaking (in the case of all three Baltic states) and Polish (in the case of Lithuania) minorities to the war in Ukraine, it appears that there is a generational difference. In Latvia, the younger generation of ethnic Russians is using social media to express its frustration with older family members who support Russia's war against Ukraine (Bergmane 2022). Some older Russians hold positive views of the Soviet past, which is associated with Russian hegemony (Stewart 2022). This often translates into support for Putin's Russia, which is seen as an extension of the USSR. Differences in attitudes regarding the war in Ukraine has introduced tensions and arguments in the families of Estonia's Russians (Avakova 2022). Most members of the Polish community in Lithuania, despite their preference for Russian news media, support the Ukrainian cause and have a negative view of Russia.

When the full-scale invasion began in 2022, the leading ethnic Russian politicians in Latvia and Harmony, a political party that promotes the interests of Latvia's Russian-speakers and had relations with Russia's pro-Putin United Russia party, condemned the war and supported measures to help Ukraine (Bergmane 2022). However, Harmony was soundly defeated in the parliamentary election in October 2022. They did not get any seats in the Parliament. Apparently, the decision of this political party to condemn the war alienated many of its voters who moved their support to For Stability!, a more extreme breakaway party that is anti-NATO and anti-EU (Golubeva 2022). This suggests that those who had

n.d.). In 2021, 23.67% of Estonia's population identified themselves as Russians (Statistics Estonia n.d.).

voted for Harmony in the past, (this party won 20% of the vote in 2018) were dissatisfied with Harmony's decision to express support for Ukraine. Instead, For Stability! won 6.8% of the vote and 11 seats in Latvia's Parliament, reflecting radicalisation among some of Latvia's ethnic Russian voters.

According to Dmitri Teperik of the International Center for Defense and Security in Tallinn, although there is a small number of pro-Putin Russians in Estonia, 'Russian-speakers who support Ukraine have gained visibility' as prominent government officials have tried to rally support for national unity (de Pommereau 2022). However, it appears that in Estonia a large group of ethnic Russians have chosen to remain passive, referring to Russia's war in Ukraine as 'not our war' instead of openly supporting or opposing the war (Duxbury 2022). Additionally, in June 2022 a relatively large segment of the population (24%) was reported as viewing Putin favourably. Admittedly, this number was down from 30% in 2021 (ERR News 2022). The Estonian right wing populist party (EKRE) that tried to woo the votes of Russian speakers by referring to Russia as a 'great civilisation', initially condemned the full-scale war in 2022. However, later they sent mixed messages about the war, arguing that the party is 'for peace' for which they received praise from the Russian state media (Jacobson & Kasekamp 2023).

Although hundreds of ethnic Russians in Latvia participated in anti-war demonstrations in April (RFE/RL 2022b), it appears that passivity ('not supporting either side') is a common response among Latvia's Russians (Bergmane 2022). According to a public opinion survey conducted at the beginning of the invasion, 21% of Latvia's Russians supported Russia and 47% chose not to take sides (Golubeva 2022). In April 2022, after Russian TV channels were banned, the percentage of those who supported Russia declined to 13%. The number of those who decided not to take sides, however, remained unchanged (Golubeva 2022). Frustrated with this situation, in November 2022, the mayor of Riga, a city where many of Latvia's Russians live, complained that all integration programmes implemented in Latvia since it regained independence had failed (ERR News 2022). In the eyes of this mayor (and many ethnic Latvians), unconditional support for Ukraine is associated with loyalty to Latvia, which places many Russian speakers in a very difficult position. The war in Ukraine has introduced new insecurities, new vulnerabilities and even new lines of division within the Baltic societies, demonstrating that vicarious identification is never absolute, and that it is a complicated and uneven process.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the term 'vicarious identification' (as developed by Browning, Joenniemi & Steele 2021) captures the behaviour and attitudes that the Baltic states have demonstrated toward Ukraine since the breakout of full-

-scale war in 2022. Baltic societies and governments have shown enthusiastic support for Ukraine, which has included unprecedented military, political and humanitarian assistance, and many instances of expressing 'we-ness' (shared identity) and familial relations. They have emphasised a shared history (highlighting the traumas of the past associated with the Soviet occupation), and articulated a commitment to a new Europe with Ukraine in it. By identifying vicariously with Ukraine, the Baltic states have been able to assert their agency and become heard in the transatlantic community, and this is why it has been a 'decolonizing moment of sorts' (Mälksoo 2022) for these states.

It is possible to link this 'vicarious identification' to similar memory regimes—the narratives of 'fighting and suffering' highlighting a Soviet genocide (the Holodomor in the case of Ukraine and the deportations and repression under Stalin in the case of all states). The collective traumas of the past associated with the Soviet Union have been remembered as the current genocidal war is taking place. Furthermore, ontological insecurity linked to the regimes of 'fighting and suffering' (and related memory contestations) of the Baltic states is the reason behind the vicarious identification with Ukraine, which is seen as courageous and resilient.

Vicarious identification with Ukraine has empowered the Baltic states to uphold their established self-narratives about 'fighting and suffering' and enhanced their position in the European security establishment. The Baltic states, together with other states from East Central Europe, which have also experienced identification with Ukraine, have become active policy makers in Europe, and their voice has become important. Finally, they have been treated as full members of the EU and transatlantic community. These developments helped to challenge the continued infantilisation of and ignorance about Eastern European states in international relations (IR) which continues to focus on the 'big' and 'strong' actors and their preferences. It has become increasingly difficult to treat the states in Central and Eastern Europe as a 'geopolitical buffer zone' (Mälksoo 2022) and continue to deny them agency. This case study supports the hypothesis that 'increased cultural capital of CEE member states' will be one of the major changes in the European policy after this war is over (Mälksoo 2022).

Domestically, vicarious identification with Ukraine has been accompanied by an 'anti-colonial nationalist politics of memory' (Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk 2019) which has included getting rid of Soviet era monuments commemorating World War II and rethinking the role of the Russian language and culture in society. By and large, vicarious identification was pursued both by the governments in the Baltic states and experienced by societies, especially by ethnic majorities. Getting rid of Soviet era monuments commemorating World War II was not seriously questioned by ethnic majorities. However, these develop-

ments have revealed some internal divisions in the three Baltic states as there has been resistance to the processes of desovietisation and derussification. The processes of vicarious identification have not been absolute, and they have exposed the vulnerabilities of Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic states, who have been suspected of 'dual loyalty'—harbouring some sympathies toward Russia and embracing a more positive view of the Soviet past.

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