Reinterpreting boundaries in times of Revolution: the mobilisation of Nationalist Historical Narratives during the Maidan

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Introduction

The paper examines the leverage that intra-group relations hold over the rise of polarized strategies of identity politics in post-Maidan Ukraine. More specifically, it explores analytical tools for linking the socialisation of previously non-dominant historical narratives to structural and political processes of state consolidation carried out by ruling elite networks.

In those polities in which the public is fractured in a variety of more-or-less well defined groups preferring different versions of the representation of the nation-state, identity politics form a mechanism of political competition between a variety of elite networks who might exploit them to fulfil their interests while gaining and stabilising their access to power and state resources. In such contexts, episodes of mass mobilisation are key in informing elites' strategies over the endorsement of discourses that might be perceived as legitimate by a large fraction of the public.

Against this background, identity politics advance confrontational historical narratives when they are instrumental in facilitating the consolidation of a newly ruling elite network at the expense of opponents in the aftermath of episodes of power redistribution.

The paper explores Ukraine's case and problematises its fragmented patterns of identification, which has been usually characterised in terms of linguistic and cultural cleavages, and polarised historical memories affecting political preferences.

The research builds on Wimmer's theory of ethnic boundary-making to assess the leverage of structural patterns of the Ukrainian polity that enable and constrain choices actors can undertake while consolidating the state along national lines. In a longitudinal perspective, I trace interactional components of political competition and relate the lack of an all-encompassing shared consensus over the location and meaning of the boundary differentiating the Ukrainian national majority from the Russian minority to a growing political salience of state-led nation-building strategies tackling historical memory.

Turning to the episode of the Maidan, the study reflects on the socialisation of slogans and rhetoric addressing the controversial glorification of OUN and UPA symbols and characters and expands on the mobilisation capacity and readiness to resort to violence of the nationalist groups that first mobilised these contested narratives. I refer to moderate elites' appropriation of these discourses in light of them being partially translated into contested policies tackling historical memory: the Law no. 2538-1 "On the Legal Status and Honouring the Memory of the Fighters for Independence of Ukraine in the 20th Century", which was included in the so-called Decommunisation Package (May 2015), shall be considered the main result of this process. .

Drawing on Hale's theory of patronal politics in Eurasian societies, the revolutionary event of the Maidan is not analysed as a moment of regime change but as a step in regime dynamics that involve high degrees of political competition between different political networks. Therein, obvious trends within the protesting group and consistent fractions of the public opinion hold a modicum of power

in shaping elites' expectation as to which divide shall be mobilised in order to catch and maintain power at the end of the confrontation.

The resultant approach to in-group dynamics allows to explain under which circumstances elites' strategy converges on polarised initiatives of identity politics that uphold narratives whose degrees of legitimacy are in part contextual to changes in political alliances and to levels of public engagement in the mobilisation.

The paper shows that partial and asymmetrical levels of consensus (i.e. of overlapping interests) determined by the magnitude of endogenous and exogenous shifts impacting over the characteristics of the social field contribute in informing a political strategy of identity politics elites can pursue also in light of previous efforts of state-led nation-building.

1. Theoretical framework

Identity politics' salience in diverse societies might be particularly acute due to the lack of an agreed understanding over modes of classification defining the core characteristics of the nation-state, as well as of the components of the national group it represents and whose interests it upholds. Andreas Wimmer's theory of ethnic boundary-making addresses some of the issues involved in the process of (trans)formation of the nation-state in divided contexts (Wimmer 2013). By pointing to the salience national divides hold over other patterns of social categorisation, Wimmer defines the emergence of modern nation-states as a processual, strategic struggle through which a population agrees upon classification modes within the social system it inhabits.

The consolidation of the state rests on the drawing of resonant boundaries. An underlying Weberian understanding of group formation as a process of social closure defines ethnicity as more than an imagined community, thus implying that strategies of boundary-making are driven by hierarchies of power and prestige they ultimately contribute to institutionalise and stabilise.

The institutional framework determines which type of boundary can be drawn in a particular social setting in a meaningful and acceptable way. The emergence of the institution of the nation-state is exogenous to the social field: modern macro-structural settings provide strong incentives to ruling state-level elites for pursuing nation-building strategies defined along "us vs. them" national divides.

Unequal access to power of the constituent groups affects the range of interests according to which actors will opt for a particular level of differentiation. The latter will be pursued in accordance to the actor's preference as to which level is perceived to further her interests. Power resources thus impact on actors' disposal of specific modes to enforce their preferred categorisation; they determine which particular strategies and means of ethnic boundary-making and enforcement can be opted for.

Political alliances determine which group will be included in the actor's own ethnic category. The configuration of political alliances allows to know where exactly the boundary us/them will be drawn: in pursuing nation-building strategies, alliances at the state level are thus consequentialist for the location of the boundary separating one or more minority from the core national group. These three characteristics of the social field enable individuals with diverse modes of social categorization: actors' opportunities for making choices and acting are therefore constrained by these characteristics' availability and configuration at a particular moment in time.

Reinterpretations of social boundaries might result from changes in the social field: new institutions, political alliances and configurations of groups' inequalities might enter the field an produce exogenous shifts; while (un)intended consequences of strategies pursued by key actors might alter the field characteristics, thus leading to endogenous shift((Wimmer 2013, 106–10). Individuals deploy categorisation modes to cross and/or alter a social boundary by recurring to strategies that ultimately define the institutional framework in which the social world is reproduced. Such a complex way of theorising points to the fact that, in any given polity, institutions are created and shaped through support by the public and by the legitimacy political initiatives promoted by

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elite networks manage to catch within this public. Interactional dynamics at the agency level are therefore at the core of the theory as they address the making and unmaking of relevant boundaries. This point clearly emerges when we look at the degrees of consensus shared in societies over socially valid and acceptable boundaries: the classificatory and political struggle between actors advocating different categories can lead to a shared understanding over the location and meaning of boundaries. On this view, a consensus between individuals and groups endowed with different resources is more likely to emerge if their interests overlap at least partially and strategies of classification can concur on a sufficiently shared view of the social world.

The reach of consensus and the extent of power inequalities among groups are key to explain variation in the properties of ethnic boundaries; i.e. their degree of social closure and of political salience, the level of cultural differentiation attached to boundaries as well as their stability in time. Levels of consensus can be asymmetrical and/or partial; that is, characterised by fundamental disagreement over the legitimacy or the political meaning attached to the ethnic divide: thus, the existence of segmented and nested fractions of public might severely impinge on the stability of such consensus in any diverse society.

In order to inspect dynamics underlying the strategic configuration and action of political alliances during and immediately after the Maidan revolution, the paper reflects on Hale's theory on patronal politics in Eurasian societies (Hale 2014): within this framework, revolutionary events are framed as predictable components of Eurasian regimes' dynamism that confront different groups of competing and vertically organised patronal networks with a crucial collective action problem as to whom will be likely to grab power at the end of the confrontation. In single-pyramid systems and due to lowering levels of popularity, incumbents might experience lame-duck syndromes that seriously impinge on the patron-president's ability to shape clients' actions: in these circumstances, clients' expectations over anticipated leadership change are dictated primarily by shifts in the current balance of power (and in particular in changes in factors beyond patron's control but believed to underpin his power), and might fuel self-fulfilling prophecies that trigger competitive struggles for succession among different patron-client networks.

A centrifugal pressure within client networks lead to phases of competing pyramids politics, a condition that characterises and affects the struggle during episodes of power redistribution. In this perspective, a primary role is attached to public opinion, for the public's ability in shaping expectations and determining networks' agreement over an anticipated collective action is found to be a major determinant for alterations in regime dynamics during succession struggles.

The logic of patronal politics shall inform the study as to how endogenous shifts that temporarily empower a political movement who claim to represent the interest of an ethnic group and who aim at redrawing the landscape of national divisions may destabilise existing balances of power and impact on elites' opportunity of overcoming a collective action problem. It helps systematise the account as to when regime dynamics are altered so that new wannabe ruling political alliances co-opts the public by popularising contextually resonant (however divisive) identity narratives.

Following Hale's framework, the mobilisation of nationalist historical narratives shall be inspected in terms of political strategy displayed in concomitance (Maidan Revolution) or after episodes of mass mobilisation (Orange Revolution) and of political competitions aimed at overcoming phases of multiple pyramid systems of power (successful electoral campaign preceding Yanukovych's presidency).

From this perspective, the consolidation of a newly ruling elite group rests on the legitimation and popularisation of a new vision of the Ukrainian state that is defined along contested and potentially divisive identity narratives.

By integrating this logic to key insights on the formation and transformation of boundaries, the paper will overcome the minor degree of determinism that can be detected in Wimmer's theoretical framework. Hale's theory contends that institutions do not prevent a given patron to privilege the

mobilisation of a given divide to be exploited strategically to polarise the country, with the ultimate aim being the one of rallying support from a determinant part of the public opinion against another fraction of the population that might opposes a (wannabe) ruling leader and/or his network.

Wimmer's theory demonstrates that the consolidation of political institutions around the notion of national identity is the best valued option for political elites to receive endorsement from the people affected by the institutional setting chosen while framing new state structures. The latter might be claimed to be different from those in the previous regime, but the lack of agreement at the public level over the definition of the national characteristics of the nation-state determines the political salience of attempts of renegotiation of categorisation patterns one can derive from previous institutional settings. Within this framework, the consolidation of the state develops from a sufficiently shared understanding over a form of nation-state, in which patterns of inclusion or exclusion of different fractions of the population depends on levels of inequalities among groups. Against this background, strategies of nation-building are privileged ones for state-level actors and are pursued through the deployment of means based on the mobilisation of diverse types of resources. Resultant political dynamics of competition among elites representing state institutions, and struggles affecting the inclusivity and exclusivity of the boundary might be particularly acute at times of crises. Therefore, mechanisms of exogenous and endogenous shifts reinforcing at the time of the Maidan shall be assessed for the impact they have on elite networks' coordination around strategic action that ultimately emphasizes some characteristics of the boundary (i.e. identification patterns defined along seemingly exclusive historical interpretations) at the expense of others.I later point to pertinent strategies and means deployed in the realm of historical policy in Ukraine, where the legacy of the soviet nationality policy determines the transition to the sovereign independent Ukrainian state be framed in national terms.

The paper draws from process-related insights over reach of consensus to systematise interactional dynamics as to how asymmetrical and partial agreements over patterns of classifications designed along historical narratives determine the political salience of negotiable characteristics of the titular group the nation-state is designed to represent.

The integration of these theoretical and analytical insights allows to bridge contextual processes on the ground that impact on the political salience of strategies of boundary shifts (at the level of the elites) to institutionalised practices of nation-building whose potential for exclusivity has been intrinsic to the construction of sovereign Ukraine as a modern nation-state (state level).

2. The political salience of history policy in Ukraine

In the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union, strong institutional incentives prompted political networks to pursue strategies of ethnic boundary-making: the legacy of the soviet nationality policy impacted on acceptable strategies for drawing meaningful boundaries along national markers. In Ukraine and elsewhere, institutions were framed as sustaining a democratic transition to a sovereign republic where political, social and cultural markers of nationality would ideally match the new titular nation-state. The major objective of nation-building strategies would then be the forging of a common sense of belonging by shifting power relations between majority and minority groups within the social structures of the new polities (Brubaker 1996; Laitin 1998; Smith et al. 1998; Chinn and Kaiser 1996; Kolstø 2000).

Following Wimmer's taxonomy on strategies of nation-building, this section focuses on pertinent practices of incorporation, whereby an existing ethnic group, i.e. the Ukrainian, is selected by the elite as the nation in which everybody should fuse. The strategy aims at reducing the number of categories and might be presented as an inclusive programme; nonetheless, minorities might escape the process of assimilation intrinsic to it and thus be excluded by the dominant national group.

Means of categorisation (to define relevant groups) and of identification (to define who belongs to which group) are enforced through the mobilisation of discursive and symbolic resources that alter the salience of a particular boundary (Wimmer 2013*).

State institutions are privileged actors for their relative advantage in making a division politically relevant, publicly acknowledged and culturally legitimate. At the state-level, nation-building strategies in Kiev would be pursued through means of Ukrainisation, indigenisation and de-Sovietisation of public administration, and of (re)invention of traditions ascribable to the newborn nation-states (Smith et al. 1998). I will show that in this latter field, historical policy would retain a growingly leading role: it would not only match the need to (re)build an imagined community, but also sustain the institutionalisation of the dominant position of ruling political alliances.

By tracing pertinent political processes along a longitudinal perspective, it will be possible to detect context-specific explanations accounting for variations in the historically-grown properties of boundaries distinguishing the Ukrainian national majority from an hard-to-define Russian minority. For the scope of the study, I shall focus on changes in the property of political salience of the boundary and analyse relevant strategies tackling historical policy rather than other contested issues (e.g. language policy).

Post-1991 institutional framework and the configuration of political alliances determine that a boundary distinguishing the Ukrainian national group from the minority indeed matters: the process of nation-building is framed to reverse power relations (between Russians and Ukrainians) in favour of the titular nation the sovereign state represents.

In the realm of historical policy and similarly to other Soviet successor states, post-1991 Ukraine experienced a process of "nationalisation of history": past experiences of the newborn state were conceptualized as the history of the nation associated with the titular ethnic group. This process results in the creation of "mutually exclusive" histories, whereby national minorities are excluded and/or designated as Other: in Ukraine, the making of a free nation entails the unmaking of the Other's, i.e. the Russians' (Torbakov 2011:212-13). The institutional framework and past experiences determine the standard account be defined along an ethnocentric canon of cultural exclusivity anchored to the myth of the Kievan Rus' as the primordial model of Ukrainian sovereignty (Kasyanov 2012:141–44).Throughout the 90s, nation-building would officially mirror the ideology of the National version of history as opposed to the Soviet one: in accordance with Wimmer's logic, institutional framework and the setting of post-perestroika political networks favoured a politics of history which was activated mainly at the state-level. The non-systematic organisation of the historical policy and the urgency of other social problems discouraged radical declarations from engaged high-levels policy actors as well as the mounting of public engagement in the issue. The Communist Party was the only political force who would contest the legitimacy of this strategy: notwithstanding president Kuchma's mobilisation of anti-nationalist narratives during the 1994 electoral campaign against the incumbent president, Leonid Kravchuk, patterns of political struggle affecting the location of interests and resources of dominant groups would not entail full "history wars". In fact, pertinent strategies would not be matched by effective means for making the preferred mode consequential for the wider public's identification practices; nor were they met by sound dissent at the societal level. Public engagement and political competition for legitimacy in categorisation practices would prevail in the sphere of language policy, while ambivalence would dominate over the politics of history, and open disputes were deliberately avoided (Kasyanov 2012:141-148).

By the late-2000s, the intellectual struggle between the sovietophile and the nationalised versions of history was relocated at the broader political stage. Standard politics of history following the collapse of a multinational empire was overridden by the one dictated by political conjunctures: strategies aimed at reviving ethno-symbolism and the myth of the exclusive historical path of the nation were tightly intertwined to political competition. While in the 1990s the Soviet version of history was presented as legitimate by the Communist Party alone, by the time of Yushchenko's

presidency political forces representing Ukraine's south-eastern regions joined the struggle. Narratives of historical memory were embedded within patterns of competition for power: the President's faction would compete against large portions of Parliament and representatives of south-eastern cities. Opposition parties would uphold counter-discourses against dominant modes for dividing the social world (Wimmer 2013) and history became a privileged tool for discrediting ruling opponents (Kasyanov 2012:151-152). Growing levels of public engagement were matched by asymmetrical degrees of agreement on the means and strategies pursued by Yushchenko government: the ideological campaign to frame the Holodomor as Ukraine's national tragedy was built on a very shaky consensus on the issue under Kuchma; attempts of granting Roman Shukhevych (UPA Commander in Chief) and Stepan Bandera (OUN leader) the title of National heroes were met with opposition within and outside the country (Kasyanov 2012:148-159). Levels of asymmetrical consensus grew deeper and contributed to polarise the country over these policies' legitimacy and relevance for the definition of the titular group of the nation-state.

During the successful presidential campaign of 2010, the Party of Regions' ideological platform managed to mobilise consensus in south-eastern oblasts over the status of the Russian language and the resistance to Yushchenko's *nationalism* in the historical policy (Kasyanov 2012. 161). As early as of February 2011, Yanukovych had dismissed the definition of the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people and withdrawn initiatives on UPA and OUN leaders. The new Ministry of Education, Dmytro Tabachnyk, reversed achievements ascribable to Yushchenko's *nationalism*: Soviet narratives on WWII were introduced in history textbooks; the compulsory teaching of Russian was reintroduced, while in south-eastern Ukraine many schools in which the teaching language was Ukrainian were closed. In 2012, the Russian language became de facto an official one in south-eastern Ukraine (Law on Minority Languages): discontent for such policies grew deeper, especially in Western Ukrainian oblasts, and possibly acted as a springboard for the nationalist Party Svoboda's relatively successful performance at the Parliamentary Elections of 2012 (Olszański 2012; Shekhovtsov 2012)

In the light of the foregoing and when looking at the state level, the nationalisation of history in Ukraine was completed as early as by the mid-1990s: the institutional structures and the configuration of political alliances encouraged the prioritisation of the interests of the group identified with the newborn state's titular nationality, and granted a degree of quasi-unanimity on the content of historical narratives.

However, the lack of resources to grant the nationalisation process a full top-down support deflated historical narratives' potential for leveraging over significant modes of identification: that is, these modes could not be made operational at the societal level, so that interpretations of history would not be relevant for defining the social boundary dividing the titular nation's group from the (Russian) minority. Ambivalence in the historical policy would therefore prevail up until the end of Kuchma's second term (2004); thereafter, a relatively widespread agreement on implementing strategies of nation-building would contrast with a growing lack of consensus over the location and meaning of levels of differentiation between the two major groups. Yushchenko's strategy of advancing national components of Ukrainian history on which consensus was lacking led to expressions of dissent from fractions of politically active society: heated public debates would involve entire foreign states (Poland and Russia, and to a lower extent also the EU) as well as the Ukrainian citizenry (Kasyanov 2012:160-161).

Both asymmetrical and partial levels of consensus and confrontational configurations of political networks account for the growing resonance history holds for identification patterns of the national group whose interests shall be upheld by the Ukrainian state. The political salience of the boundary defined along historical discourses also grew and turned to be correlated to a process of social closure.

The Orange Revolution has been fuelling this phenomenon. Some analysts have highlighted that domestic divisiveness was key for successful mass mobilsation: Way (2006) argues that an "anti-incumbent majority identity" could counterbalance the weakness of local civil society; and that regional cleavages had made it possible for the opposition to use national identity as a mobilization weapon against incumbents. Similarly, Beissinger's (2013) analysis of survey data and detects a weaker-than-expected commitment to the revolution's democratic narrative, and a higher leverage of cultural cleavages and symbolic capital to construct a negative coalition across diverse policy groupings. Lane (2008) finds that the protesting movement was divisive more than integrative and did not enjoy high levels of support.

Notwithstanding the primary drive for mass mobilisation, identity narratives mobilised during the protest (and defined primarily along language rather than ethnic preferences) accounted for a growing East/West political polarisation that contributed to the alienation of Eastern-Ukrainians from decision-making processes (Arel 2006). In particular, Yushchenko's framing of the European vector in foreign policy as a process of historical alienation from Russia would negatively impact on levels of legitimacy from large portions of south-eastern residents who would then react to the discursive linking of initiatives in historical policy to the country's "European choice" in a similar fashion.

Against this background, the transition from Yushchenko's to Yanukovych's regime would reveal the same problematic phenomenon, despite the opposite contents and results. Yanukovych's formal commitment to a balanced policy between the European and the Russian vectors of Ukraine's foreign policy could not but contrast with the Soviet nostalgia intrinsic to initiatives promoted by ideologically committed members of the Party of Regions. These initiatives provoked discontent and alienation in Ukraine's western regions, so that, by the time of the reversal of Yushchenko's policies, the leverage of asymmetrical and partial degrees of consensus over forms of identification entailed in historical policies had been firmly tightened to wider political implications, most notably, citizens' geopolitical preferences.

It follows that degrees of political salience of strategies of boundary-making did enforce: with regards to strategies of identification pursued through initiatives in the politics of history, a growing salience of competing narratives can be detected as affecting both the meaning and location of the boundary defining the Ukrainian national group as well as the attitudes and preferences of the wider public's political attitudes.

Following Wimmer's theorisation on mechanisms of changes to boundaries and with regards to the decade preceding the Maidan Revolution it is possible to detect a crucial interplay between exogenous and endogenous mechanisms that contributed to the growing leverage of historical narratives for strategies of boundary-making as displayed during periods of power redistribution and political competition. Both shift also took place in the second and most turbulent phase of the Maidan uprising of 2014.

Exogenous shifts, i.e. changes emerging when an external actor enters a field and is actively involved in the Ethnic politics of a country, would primarily result from growing competition between the European Union and Russia over a key shared neighbour (Torbakov 2011, 212–14). The pervasiveness of the strategy of the Russian Federation in favouring and supplying counter-discourses to political networks whose interests were opposed to the ones entailed in the national project presented by Yushchenko altered the characteristics of the social field in which political developments took place. Yanukovych's strategic reversal of Yushchenko's policies was also aimed at pleasing interests intrinsic to Russia's strategies towards "compatriots" in the Ukraine and at providing legitimacy to the new ruling alliance across fractions of an electorate whose political preferences were growingly defined along territorially polarised patterns of vote.

Endogenous shifts within field characteristics were enacted by changes in existing balances of power, institutional framework and political alliances. The Orange Revolution empowered a political movement who claimed to represent the interest of the national group and would actively pursue the redrawing of the landscape of national divisions. The return to a vertical power system under Yanukovych's presidency impacted on group relations as well as on institutional framework, thus again the system of ethnic boundaries was partly subverted. The impact of this type of shift during the Maidan is better understood when placed within Hale's logic of patronal politics : within this framework, mechanisms of change in the characteristics of political alliances and power relations are intertwined to the strategy aimed at subverting the dominance of the single-pyramid system ruling at the state level.

Most importantly, by the time of the beginning of the Maidan, identity politics tackling historical memory had become overtly conflictual and had proven to be effective in polarising the country and in catching and mobilising the support, or at least the approval, of a determinant part of the public opinion against another fraction of the population along regionally defined political cleavages. Drawing on Hale, we can see historical policy as a key component of elites' political strategy: it is a tool to mobilise fractions of population for supporting a new leader and/or political alliance that aims at replacing the current ruling class and at upholding a new vision of the state. The stabilisation and institutionalisation of new ruling political alliances is therefore tightened to the promotion of new national characteristics of the Ukrainian state, as well as of the components of the national group it represents and whose interests it upholds. These features are mobilised in order to collect support from consistent fractions of the population whose interests overlap at least partially with the ones pursued by ruling elites.

In the following, the paper inspects intra-group relations as unfolding within the composite group opposing Yanukovych's presidency during the Maidan uprising and maintains a focus on processes informing political networks' coordination around strategies that might catch a crucial fraction of the public's legitimacy

3. The struggle over boundaries during the Maidan

In distinguishing a divergence from the Orange Revolution, i.e. the circumstance that divisive interpretations of history were mobilised as early as during the event of mass mobilisation, this section of the paper points to the magnitude of key exogenous and endogenous shifts that interact with each other and alter elites' patterns of pertinent strategic action during and immediately after the most turbulent phase of the Maidan Revolution (January 2014 onwards).

In order to assess the impact the uprising had on elites' strategies of boundary-making, I focus on the regime dynamism that marks the phase during which the initial protesting group's demand over the signing of the association agreement with the European Union was subsided by the one prioritising the resignation of the unpopular President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych.

The paper points to the existence of diverse actors driven by different political motivations for joining the episode of mass mobilisation and makes the case for nationalist groups' participation to the protest. A primary concern is with the dynamism that characterises the shift from non-violent to violent forms of protest and with its impact on the processual struggle that later leads to an agreement over significant and acceptable modes of political identification defined along nationalist interpretations of history.

Some analysts have pointed to nationalist parties' poor performances at the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of 2014 to stress that far-right groups' participation could not impinge on the democratic base of the Maidan Revolution (Shekhovtsov and Umland 2014). A focus on electoral performances is ill-suited to the scope of the study and shall be dismissed to privilege an approach that problematises the impact that the strategies pursued by actors endowed with different

resources had over moderate elites' opportunity of overcoming a collective action problem by the time of power redistribution.

Following this logic, key far-right groups are identified as provoking an endogenous shift that affects the framing of strategies of boundary-making of moderate political elites.

Drawing on Wimmer, I distinguish crucial changes in the mix of strategic action pursued by different agents that cascade into shifts in the structure of boundaries (Kuran 1998). The focus is on those radicals' strategies that "tip" the dynamics of interaction and negotiation, thus leading to a new consensus over the legitimacy of (re)interpretations of boundaries.

In this view, processes of mass mobilisation empower political movements who claim to represent the interests of a group and aim at redrawing the landscape of socially relevant divisions: the bargaining power of different actors is altered in the ongoing process of negotiation and contestation, thus prompting elites to pursue new strategies of boundary-making (Wimmer 2013. 106-10).

a) Far right groups' strategy

I maintain that in order to understand when and how elites' collective action converges on strategies of boundary-making that build on radical nationalists' narratives of historical memory it is key to zoom on far-right groups' mobilisation capacity and readiness to resort to violence.

The paper limits the analysis to Svoboda, that first mobilised forms of radical nationalism in the square and largely relied on the symbolic however controversial resonance of OUN and UPA slogans and flags; and to Pravy Sektor, a new loose organisation of far-right radicals that took the leadership over systematic episodes of violence.

Svoboda's participation to the Revolution shall be assessed for the party's ability to radicalize the Maidan in Kiev before violence erupted there and elsewhere in January 2014. Prior to the 2012 breakthrough at the Parliamentary elections, the nationalist party had developed a good organisational capacity that allowed it to take considerable advantage of both Yanukovych's unpopularity and of weakened national democratic parties. Svoboda's political strategy resulted in a successful on-the-ground recruitment and mobilisation campaign initiated in western Ukraine well before the Revolution (Polyakova 2014). The party could benefit from its relatively strong position in Western municipalities to develop the highest levels of protest capacity and, by the end of the Revolution, it emerged as the most active collective agent in conventional and confrontational episodes of mass mobilisation (Ishchenko 2016).

In December 2013, Svoboda started popularising flags, slogan and symbols of the OUN and UPA: the expansion of the nationalist party's themes and rhetoric to the broader masses was the result of a strategy of political activism whose success depends on different factors. An initial fear of splitting the movement possibly prevented moderate protesters and opposition leaders' open rejection of the contested glorification of OUN and UPA leaders as predecessors of Ukraine's struggle for independence. Later, Russia's meddling in Ukraine's domestic politics facilitated a shift in the meaning of radical narratives among other activist groups (Kulyk 2014).

It is key to note that patterns of political competition established prior to the Maidan had enabled new configurations of power alliances in which Svoboda would join moderate opposition parties in a common struggle against Yanukovych's regime. In this perspective, moderate elites' tolerance of Svoboda had allowed for its recognition as a legitimate political actor (Ishchenko 2016); a recognition that was later confirmed also in light of Tyahnybok's official calls for peaceful forms of protest (Fedorenko 2015) and that the newly formed Pravy Sektor was not granted.

Pravy Sektor's impact shall be inspected in light of the group being the major violent collective actor as of January onwards (Kulyk 2014; Likhachev 2015; Ishchenko 2016). When Yanukovych government passed a set of laws making protest formally illegal (January 16, 2014), representatives of parliamentary oppositions entered a crisis of confidence: Svoboda itself would lag behind

radicalizing portions of masses and its calls for moderation would be blamed for contrasting with its early radical rhetoric (Kulyk 2014).

Svoboda and other parties' decline was counterbalanced by a growing activity of Pravy Sektor, which took official responsibility for the initiation of large-scale violence that erupted on January 19,2014 (Likhachev2015, Kulyk 2014, Ishchenko 2016, Kudelia 2018). The group's revolutionary ideology of political action was well-timed to pursue the much-demanded removal of Yanukovych. Due to its embeddedness in the protest, Pravy Sektor's violent strategy minimised costs of participation to non-violent mobilisation and increased costs of repression for Yanukovych's regime beyond acceptable levels(Kudelia 2018). The power sharing agreement and the successful ousting of Yanukovych maximised the strategy's potential; before that, Pravy Sektor had helped moderate parties to seize power in local councils in central and western Ukraine (Ishchenko 2016).

Both Svoboda's and Pravy Sektor's nationalisms represent a form of political strategy aimed at overcoming the current balance of power between moderate political networks.

While the inclusion of Svoboda party representatives in Kiev's ad interim government (February-May 2014) signals a relative degree of openness to Tyahnybok's political group, Pravy Sektor remained formally exogenous to the acceptable configuration of political networks *eligible* to compete for power. The circumstance that by mid-January the group's violent strategy had become de facto complementary to moderate elites' non-violent mobilisation (Kudelia 2018) diverge the centrifugal pressure conventional political networks experience. Following the ouster of Yanukovych, a situation of competitive cooperation involving moderate elites and Pravy Sektor's as well as other far-right groups' armed battalions emerge, as the latter two collective actors started performing State functions in the field of Defence Sector and Internal security (Puglisi 2015; Minakov 2015; Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016).

Svoboda and Pravy Sektor present conventional elites with a crucial collective action problem. Against this background, in the phase of competing pyramid politics that anticipates the ouster of Yanukovych, obvious trends within the public opinion hold a modicum of power in shaping elites' expectations as to which narratives and divides will maximise the potential to secure a dominant position in the future power structures.

I briefly trace the dynamics that account for the emergence of new patterns of consensus at the societal level: a primary concern is with the impetus to review the meaning of the boundary provided by the interaction between endogenous mechanisms emerging from nationalist groups' strategies and the major source of exogenous shift; i.e. Russia's unprecedented scale of intervention in Ukraine's ethnic politics.

Thus, I expand on how interactional dynamics shed light on strategic implications derived from a crucial salience ascribable to partial degrees of consensus that far-right groups' narratives managed to catch across a consistent part of the public opinion, i.e. the one that would either participate with a different ideological motivation to the protest movement or support the movement's demands.

b) Changing degrees of consensus and effects on elites' strategies

The interaction of Russia's aggressive strategy in Ukraine with far-rights groups' produced a bifurcated result.

Moscow's active involvement in the ethnic politics of Kiev was successful to the extent to which it exacerbated levels of asymmetrical consensus across Ukraine's south-eastern territories over the legitimacy of modes of identification deducible from historical narratives mobilised by the Maidan protest movement. Relying heavily on politics of memory, the Kremlin's "humanitarian" strategy towards "compatriots" in Ukraine was reinforced to unprecedented levels following the ouster of Yanukovych (February 22): the repeal of the Law on Language, the incorporation of Svoboda's representatives in Kiev's ad interim cabinet and the spread of anti-Maidan uprisings in south-eastern regions widened Moscow's range of manoeuvre to fulfil its geopolitical interests. In Crimea and Donbass, Russian media's strategy of demonising the protest by inflating a "neo-nazi threat"

intertwined to nationalist groups' visibility and produced the intended effect: it amplified the danger of an exclusivist programme of political nationalism being adopted at the state level and strongly impacted on those south-eastern Ukrainians whose attitude towards the Revolution was already negative (Kudelia 2014; Giuliano 2015; Ishchenko 2016; Katchanovski 2016; Kudelia 2017).

An unintended result of Russia's strategy of depicting the Maidan as an extreme nationalist protest was that it played in favour of those groups the propaganda was targeting. Against this background, Moscow's policy intertwined with changing degrees of partial consensus internal to the composite protest movement and referred to boundaries defined along historical memory.

Even before the ascent of Pravy Sektor, the Kremlin's attempts to draw Yanukovych closer to prevent Ukraine from integrating into the European Union contributed to the growth of negative attitudes towards Russia among liberal and Western-oriented protesters (Kulyk 2014).

In turn, by tolerating the participation of Svoboda in light of a common enemy (Yanukovych), moderate protesters and opposition parties allowed the nationalist party to maximise its mobilisation capacity (Ishchenko 2016).

In January 2014, Svoboda's torch-lit march to commemorate the anniversary of Stepan Bandera was joined by protesters not affiliated with the party and despite other opposition leaders' warnings over the risk of discrediting the whole movement. When the OUN and Svoboda's slogan "Glory to Ukraine!" was adopted by protesters and moderate opposition leaders, it was charged with a meaning apparently detached of its original national exclusivity and referred to myths of resistance (Kulyk 2014. 99-101). The incompatibility between Svoboda's exclusivist agenda and other activists' and parties' motivations for joining the Revolution could be smoothened on the basis of the location of a boundary that moderate protesters emphasise for its political and non-ethnic meaning: the malleability of resultant modes of identification anchored to historical memory contrasts with the more intrinsic exclusiveness of other divides framed along language preferences or ethnicity.

As large-scale violence erupted, episodes of brutal repression contributed to a relative popularity of Pravy Sektor: the group came to be represented as the Maidan's symbolic "defender", with Dmytro Yarosh being perceived as the leader of the Ukrainian national revolution (Likhachev 2015).

Other than Russia's aggressive stance, Svoboda's activity had possibly prepared the ground to the degrees of relative legitimacy Pravy Sektor's violent strategy managed to catch, as by early January and even among liberal-minded protesters discourses of civic loyalty would be joined by those on the necessity to prevail as "Ukrainians" (Kulyk 2014. 98).

Dynamics of mass mobilisation thus provided the conditions for bridging moderate protesters' and opposition elites' *civic* nationalism to seemingly incompatible versions of radical nationalism mobilised by Pravy Sektor and Svoboda.

Still, the diverse groups' contextual convergence on the overlapping interest of removing Yanukovych earlier and safeguarding Ukraine's territorial integrity from Russia's aggression later does not overshadow structural explanations for this phenomenon.

Previous state-led nation-building strategies determine that the framing of strategies of boundary-making along contested historical memory is acceptable and meaningful to the extent to which they match a fraction of the public's political preferences. The growing political salience that type of boundary had acquired allows to advance modes of identification that ultimately support political networks' dominant position, as well as their initiatives in domestic and international politics.

Thus, past experiences of attempts at relating history policy to domestic and foreign policy priorities facilitate the legitimacy the rhetoric targeting radical figures acquired among fractions of the public supporting the Maidan: Yushchenko's initiatives in history policy would represent a precedent in this context, to the same extent to which the Party of Regions' campaign against the nationalism of the leader of the Orange Revolution would resonate for and amplify asymmetrical

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degrees of consensus with boundaries emerging from the Maidan Revolution among fractions of south-eastern Ukrainians.
Partial degrees of consensus determined by the magnitude of endogenous and exogenous shifts in the social field inform a political strategy of identity politics that elites can pursue also in light of previous processes of state-led nation-building.

The blurring of the ideological boundary differentiating liberals' and far-right forces' political programmes alters the legitimacy of the latter's and impacts on the transformation of the bargaining power of actors engaged in the underlying process of renegotiation of boundaries through history.

Following the Revolution and in a renewed multiple system of competing pyramid politics, moderate elites exploitation of radicals' slogans and rhetoric shall be assessed contributing in shifting the state-level political actors strategy towards more exclusivist practices

4. Conclusions

The paper has provided a rationale for the conditions that have favoured the construction of the Ukrainian state in national terms. It has explored structural characteristics that impact on the room for exclusivist policies: the latter has been shown to be intrinsic to State structures and dependent on framing patterns inherited from the Soviet Union as well as in tension with developments taking place within the configuration of political alliances and of group inequalities.
The study has demonstrated that the lack of a shared consensus over key characteristics of the boundary distinguishing the titular national group from the Russian minority has been carrying a potential for conflict and confrontation that has proved to be particularly problematic when attempts of implementing policies upholding contested historical narratives have been advanced.
Having assessed structural opportunities to elites' strategies of boundary-making through identity politics, and having inspected the growing political salience of contested historical narratives; the study has pointed to key episodes during which the configuration of political alliances and of power relations have been reshaped.

Both the Orange and the Maidan Revolution were characterised by weakening levels of popularity of an incumbent president and by an agreement over the need to alter the balance of power among competing groups. Drawing on Hale, this process lead political elites to act strategically in order to build new alliances to rule at the central level. In Ukraine's case these dynamics would go hand-in-hand with the support for the programmatic idea of building a "new" Ukrainian nation-state, where the latter is defined along potentially divisive identity narratives that are later translated into strategies and means of state-led nation-building.

Therefore, by the beginning of the Revolution of Dignity, discourses on past experiences were a consolidated component of political competition impacting on expectations among elites who might expect a weak incumbent president to leave.

In this context, opposition elites expectations are affected by changes in political alliances and power relations between that are brought abou by groups as well as within the components of an extremely fractured protest movement. The dynamics traced signal that far right groups creates a tension and destabilises the institutional framework; and affect the balance of power in the contestation, thus shaping and prompting new configurations of political alliances.

In this perspective, the growing salience of identity politics has been detected not only in its impact over settings of elite networks but also in a growing mobilisation capacity of narratives aimed at redrawing the characteristics of the nation-state that have growingly been tightened to (geo)political preferences.

Following the Revolution and in a renewed multiple system of competing pyramid politics, moderate elites exploitation of radicals' slogans and rhetoric shall be assessed for contributing in shifting the state-level political actors strategy towards more exclusivist practices

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