

Of Memory, Agency, Identity, and Nostalgia: Eastern Ukrainians and the Politics of De-Communization

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Introduction

- Indeed, we all come from childhood. And this is not an empty phrase. The older you are, the deeper you understand it. Because, truly, at the age of, let's say, 15, 20, 25 years, this seems like a popular cliché, but when you are over some more decades of your life for some reason everything associated with childhood is remembered as something very touching, tender, and what is most interesting that you want to recollect it.

Elena Kostenko, Interview by Iuliia Skubytska, audio recording, Kharkiv, 03.23.2016

When in 2015, I arrived at my home city of Kharkiv, situated in Eastern Ukraine, to start my research there, my major concern was that I did not manage to buy a portable camera to record interviews with the locals about their Soviet childhood. I took a course in Oral History, made it a field in my exams, and went to Ukraine determined to follow the best practices. Little did I know of what was waiting for me. It was an achievement to just make a recording and ensure that the person signed a release. Public placement or even a public archive were not the options. Many of my interviewees were clearly afraid or felt uncomfortable talking about their Soviet childhood.¹

Born in the Soviet Ukraine in 1983, I was not exposed to the work of Soviet repressive machine, which definitely created a gap in my understanding of what I was going to face conducting my research in Kharkiv. I grew up in what could be described a dysfunctional state, where laws were barely observed and constantly manipulated to someone's advantage. Until 2014, Ukraine to a large extent seemed as a non-intrusive state that barely controlled its territory and did not bother with shaping its population's way of thinking.² It was a comfortable balance of interests, although a fragile one, the one that lacked ground for stability. The latter became evident when this balance was ruined by the Russian intervention of 2014.

As propaganda became one of the major tools in the hybrid war that unfolded between Russia and Ukraine, the latter started taking major steps in the area of cultural politics. On April 9, 2015, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted a package of de-communization laws that aimed to "eliminate the consequences of Soviet ideology" in Ukraine. De-Communization

¹¹ The interviews, in which this paper is grounded were recorded during my fieldwork conducted in Kharkiv, Eastern Ukraine in 2015-2016. I did the research in the framework of working on my dissertation *It Takes a Union to Raise a Soviet: Children's Summer Camps as a Reflection of Late Soviet Society*.

² Iuliia Skubytska, "Gibkost' haosa vmesto stroinosti ansambliia: dvadtsat' let postsovetskogo Khar'kova," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 2011, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2011/6/s5.html>.

meant not only changes of names for cities, streets, and villages. One of its major laws criminalized any displays of communist regime's propaganda including "public rejection of the criminal character of the communist totalitarian regime in Ukraine in 1917-1991."³

The adoption of this law together with official discourse of blaming the population of the Eastern regions for the war shaped both my experience of conducting interviews in the area and the stories my interviewees told me. The first sign of future complications appeared when I wrote an official letter to ask for an access to an archive at one of Kharkiv enterprises. A response that I received cautioned me about the de-communization law and possible illegal character of my research in Ukraine. Its mysterious author, who did not sign his or her name, was not the only person who worried about the effects of de-communization. I studied the law and learned that scholarship on the USSR was not illegal, so I proceeded. Yet, it took only two interviews to reveal for me the range of issues I was facing. My second interviewee, a senior trade union official, deliberately rejected being recorded because she feared that our talk could be heard by representatives of the Ukrainian Security Service. After our conversation, I heard numerous rejections from other people whom my interviewees were trying to engage in my project. The rejections often came after these people talked to someone, a relative or a friend, who told them about possible dangers of our interview. Remarkably, in most cases people who agreed to an interview, but did not want it to be recorded and did not want to sign anything were those who under the Soviet rule occupied administrative positions. For example, I had a former school principal, who, I hoped, would tell me his story about being a musical teacher in summer camps. He told me that he did not allow to record his voice and would never sign anything.

The Ukrainian Security Service was not the only audience my interviewees saw behind my shoulder. My other strange companion turned out to be the "all-powerful and very intrusive West". The trade union official, who refused a recording of our conversation (she still talked to me about her experience as a camp organizer), connected me with other people who could tell me their stories. Her suggestion, however, was not to tell them what university I was affiliated with. The situation became very complicated for me, as it definitely went against the best practices and against the possibility of establishing the relationship of trust between me and my interviewees. The interview that resulted from this, was peculiar first and foremost because I had a long conversation with my informants to establish trust and only then revealed my affiliation.

The issue of interpretation was a third problem that created my interviewees' distrust towards me. My third inalienable companion, another audience my interviewees were talking to is harder to identify, though. In short, this was an audience hostile to their past, like the Ukrainian statesmen, for example. A lot of factors played into this: my age, Ukraine's de-communization policies, my interviewee's lack of experience in dealing with scholars, as well as their lack of understanding why I was interested in their stories. These factors affected some interviews more, and others less, but speaking more generally, the hostility in Ukraine towards its Soviet past expressed at the official level influenced almost every story that I heard. Very few of my interviewees dissociated themselves from current political realities of Ukraine. The stories about childhood got permeated by the discourse of politics. Because of this, I became particularly interested in the narrative strategies through which my interviewees balanced their self-identification, integrity, and Ukraine's official narrative that presented the Soviet past as a time, when Ukraine and Ukrainians were helpless victims of supposedly

³ "Zakon Ukrainy 'Pro zasudzhennia kommunistychnoho ta natsional-sotsialistychnoho (natsysts'koho) totalitarnykh rezhymiv v Ukraini ta zaboronu propahandy yikhnoi symboliky'" (2015), <https://bit.ly/2FCEmgO>.

external violence of the Soviet (in current Ukraine, meaning Russian) state.

The person standing behind the new concept of Ukrainian XXth century history as a period of constant agent-less oppression was Volodymyr Viatrovykh, the head of Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. For Viatrovykh, all ties Ukrainian citizens had with the Soviet past had to be deliberately severed. In his interview given to an *Ukrainska Pravda* correspondent right after the adoption of the de-communization laws on April 10, 2015, Viatrovykh characterized the Soviet rule as “totalitarian” claiming that people affected by it were passive and unable to adapt to a new life that Ukrainian independence brought: “Once, one media made a beautiful map of Ukraine containing data about the monuments to or streets named after Lenin. These data were compared with the local population’s level of life. And the places with Lenins were also characterized by a lower level of self-employment, lower level of people’s mobility, so they did not even leave the territory of their district [rayon].”⁴ Thus, Viatrovykh claimed that memory about the Soviet past was responsible for the lack of economic agency and entrepreneurial skills as well as geographical isolation and certain narrow-mindedness associated with it. Later in the interview, Viatrovykh argued that Russia had turned into a new version of the USSR specifically through its self-isolation, which made it a negative example for Ukraine, who was striving to follow the European model. Then, he stated: “Yet, we need to understand that Russian propaganda uses Ukrainians’ nostalgic feelings to mobilize them in fighting against Ukraine. The majority of the fighters against Ukraine in all these DNR and LNR are people, for whom the Soviet past is the sense of life.”⁵ Thus, if we do not do anything with that Soviet past, then the danger of the Russian aggression’s dissemination will continue hanging over us.”⁶

Viatrovykh’s discourse found strong support in Ukrainian society, especially among the Western Ukrainian population, that was already dissatisfied with the lack of support to the Revolution of Dignity in the East.⁷ This way, the Eastern regions became a nuisance to the rest of the country. They did not pay with blood for the regime change often openly opposing it, yet they now required another, much bigger sacrifice on behalf of the rest of the country as it got involved into the unfolding war. This does not mean that there was no social discussion about de-communization and its methods as well as about the blame put on the civil population for not protecting Ukrainian territory from invasion (a function usually performed by the army). Yet it was not prominent enough to prevent Eastern Ukrainians from doubting their belonging to the political project of Ukraine stronger than before.

One of the results of this alienation from the Ukrainian political project that emerged under Viatrovykh’s guidance was the victory of Vladimir Zelensky in the presidential elections in April 2019. The overwhelming victory of this presidential candidate, who came to power with a platform aiming to reconcile the conflicts within the country instead of polarizing its society testified to the fatigue that various social groups felt over the heavy burden of the previous president’s ideological and economic discourses. While many factors contributed to Zelensky’s victory, in this paper I will focus specifically on the reasons why the discourses of

⁴ Volodymyr Viatrovykh, “Nashe zavdannia –shchob sovok ne vidtvoryvsia u maibutnikh pokolinniakh,” interview taken by Mariana Pietsukh, *Ukrainska pravda*, April 10, 2015, accessed on Sept. 15, 2019, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2015/04/10/7064423/>.

⁵ In the original: живуть радянським минулим.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See, for example Piotr Armianovskyi and Olena Apchel, *Hirchytisia v sadakh*, DVD, directed by Piotr Armianovsky, Donetsk, 2018. The film was demonstrated at the Biennale of Young Ukrainian Art in Kharkiv (09.17.2019-10.31.2019).

unity and removal of heavy anti-Soviet rhetoric became popular with the Eastern Ukrainian population.

Ukrainian Memory Politics before 2014

Throughout the period of Ukraine's independence numerous ideologues and historians portrayed the country's XXth century past as a time of oppression and absence of agency. The first and very prominent symbol of both that received strong political support was Holodomor of 1932-1933. Presented as a crime committed against the Ukrainian nation by the outsiders (Stalin, on whose orders it was executed), Holodomor became a powerful symbol of Ukrainian victimhood and suffering in the hands of the Soviet authorities. The president who invested significant resources in the information campaign and research devoted to Holodomor was Viktor Yushchenko. During his term, the Museum of Holodomor appeared, numerous monuments commemorating the tragedy were installed all around the country. Yushchenko's time however was characterized by the lack of central authorities' control over the country's territory. While the new narrative managed to reach out to the people, the reaction to it was evasive. For example, in Kharkiv, where I conducted research, the memorial complex devoted to Holodomor was constructed outside of the city, where it became literally invisible.

In general, until Viktor Yanukovich's ascendance to power, Kharkiv managed to avoid giving prominence to the visual embodiments of the new Ukrainian identity discourse produced at the center.⁸ The fact that the situation changed with the new leadership did not mean that Kharkiv authorities became more patriotic. Rather, they realized that any big transformations in the city were a profitable enterprise. As a result, they organized a major reconstruction of the Constitution Square in the city center removing the monument celebrating 50 years of Soviet rule and replacing it with a sculptural composition "Flying Ukraine" devoted to the country's independence. It has to be noted that although the square's transformation, which almost erased a small park on it, instigated certain resistance, the reaction to it was rather moderate. Partly, this was due to the fact that performed by city authorities the renovations were not supported by a comprehensive communication campaign that buttressed new development project with a grounded official narrative regarding the Soviet past. In general, Yanukovich's rule was characterized by a lack of the authorities' consistent interest in the topic of Ukrainian memory politics.⁹

With the Revolution of Dignity, the Annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas and Petro Poroshenko's ascendance to presidency, the situation has dramatically changed. People like Volodymyr Viatrovykh started gaining more prominence, their popularity increased, and socially polarizing discourse they promoted stimulated rather hostile discussions. As politics became a part of everyday discussions in Ukrainian families and workplaces, people felt pressured to take a stand. For Eastern regions in particular, the situation was exacerbated by the fact that both Russian and Ukrainian official discourses presented Donbas war and Crimea's annexation as the developments driven by the free will of the locals.¹⁰ The interviews I conducted in Kharkiv in 2015-2016 reflected the discomfort caused by this pressure. Only a few of my interviewees openly and directly criticized the new developments in the country. Others expressed their feelings differently, through more abstract remarks or even questions,

⁸ Skubytska Iuliia, "Gibkost' haosa vmesto stroinosti ansambliia: dvadtsat' let postsovetskogo Khar'kova," *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 2011, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2011/6/s5.html>.

⁹ See for example: Oleksandr Hrytsenko, *Prezydenty i pamiat'*. Polityka pamiaty prezydentiv Ukrainy (1994-2014): pidgruntia, poslannia, realizatsia, rezul'taty (Kyiv: Instytut kul'turolohii NAN Ukrainy, 2017), 835-1018.

which they used to identify, whether I can show support to their views and identification more generally. In it, I demonstrate that what may look like a nostalgia is more of a coping mechanism of making sense of the challenges posed by political, social, and economic realities in Ukraine, a reaction through which my interviewees articulate their identities and comment on the situation they find themselves in.

We Are Not Victims!

While Viatrovich and his supporters politicize positive comparisons between the Soviet past and Ukrainian present qualifying them as nostalgia that compels people to “fight against Ukraine”, the very qualification of Eastern Ukrainian’s discourses about the past as nostalgic needs closer examination. In his research on post-socialist Bulgarian teachers’ self-identification, Tim Pilbrow insists that nostalgia is an unproductive term in analyzing their narrative strategies.¹¹ “Far from evincing a nostalgic or backward-looking past-dependence, narratives of continuity, I argue, are a strategic resource in the management of present identifications and the memories through which present identifications are sustained,” Pilbrow claims.¹² The importance of continuity of one’s own identity in time and integration of the personal past and present into a coherent self-narrative became the reasons why Viatrovych’s demonization of the Soviet time accompanied by victimization of people who lived under the Soviet rule produced strong reaction from my interviewees.

It is hard to say whether in this case one can even talk about nostalgia, which in its classical definition refers to the longing for the irreversibly lost past.¹³ In fact, this definition runs against first and foremost Viatrovych’s own understanding of nostalgia as in his opinion nostalgic feelings imply a belief that the past can be retrieved and resurrected in the present. While some of my interviewees’ discursive patterns possess nostalgic characteristics, one of the major reasons why they appear is dissatisfaction with the present situation and the authorities attack on the people’s feeling of integrity expressed through the deliberate condemnation of the Soviet time.

The most visible way in which my interviewees protested against the de-communicization discourse was the denial of their victimhood. Here is an excerpt of my interview with Aleksandra Sergeeva, in which she addresses this issue:

A. S. Well, all of this was *vospitanie*, ideology, everything was good, how good it was to live in the country of soviets. But it was truly good, truly it was good. That is why I, I am a happy Soviet child. I think, I cannot understand what is happening. What is against communism, against... Yes, I had a happy childhood. I was not hungry, I ate everything I wanted. Yes, maybe we did not have something, like these kiosks, which are standing there and children are begging “buy me this”, or, there were no temptations, there were no such temptations. Yet, still, parents, well there weren’t... Well, to begin with, I did not live in the city, I lived in the village. We had shops, and then private cooked food shops appeared. There, they sold some precooked food and pastry. Not like in the shop, everything was fresh. There were two canteens, they baked, there were cakes and other stuff, you know, ice cream or milkshakes.[...] Well there were bars, as they call them now, in these

¹¹ Tim Pilbrow, “Dignity in Transition: History, Teachers, and the Nation-State in post-1989 Bulgaria” in *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille eds. (Bergahn Books, 2010), 82-96.

¹² *Ibid.*, 87.

¹³ See: Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (NY: Basic Books, 2001).

canteens, then, they were called cafes. But we didn't go there, it was enough for us to buy an ice cream for seven copecks in a shop and run on.¹⁴

Aleksandra's reflections on her Soviet childhood could be presented as idealization of the past. Yet, it is hard not to notice that primarily in this excerpt my interviewee struggles with the feeling of depreciation of her childhood experience. She starts with the political cause: "I cannot understand what is happening. What is against communism, against...", yet smoothly moves to the economic reasoning with access to enough food becoming a prominent issue, which she continues to develop:

A.S. There were no these kiosks, but I would not say that we were deprived of something, I don't know. Our mom baked and fried, she made cookies, cakes, and pirogies in baskets, fried doughnuts, somehow I don't know, I didn't suffer there. That's why we grew up so well-fed. I say to my parents: "had you paid attention to this, that we ate pirogies in the morning..." Mom says: "So what. Then, there was no such fashion, no diets, no figure, everyone was walking around good. So, I say if mom bakes God knows how many baking trays, two baskets of pierogis are standing. You walk and eat as much as you want. I don't know. We had meat, we had chicken, and we ate everything and did not suffer, parents did not give us these things one at a time. And at school, here you go, that pastry costed seven kopecks. My dear Lord, this is completely unimaginable. And what now? We had free lunches, and that milk that we hated so much, of course.

I.S. With foam.

A.S. Yes, with foam. I don't know, you know. I don't know why it was so bad in the USSR, why everyone is against communism. Maybe something was bad, but I had a happy childhood. I went to a summer camp, and I went to Artek once".¹⁵

These excerpts demonstrate two important emphases that my interviewee makes in her narrative regarding abundance. First, there is a belief in the corrupt influence of free market on children (and people more generally), as Aleksandra states that though they did not have kiosks and access to the variety of goods they offered, they did not need that variety because they were preoccupied with other things. Thus, kiosks, the way Aleksandra presents them lead to children refocusing from the activities that she was engaged in as a child to begging parents so that they could get something, increasing the financial burden on them.

Then, there is also a significant focus on food as a marker of prosperity and satisfaction with life. Aleksandra presents the relationships with food in the past as unbiased (one could eat as much as he or she wanted without worrying about their looks). She also insists on the food's abundance that was ensured by the family and the state (school lunches). The state remains on the background of Aleksandra's interview, yet its presence becomes visible with the mentioning of the prices for food, school lunches, and summer camp trips that included the most promoted summer camp Artek, situated at the Black Sea coast. Food as a marker of prosperity requires further attention, as my interviewees talked about it a lot. Taking into account that the first trauma that gained big prominence in Ukrainian official memory narrative was Holodomor associated with extreme food deprivation, one could conclude that while talking about traumatic topics in general and the points of focus for Ukrainians, food should be paid special attention to, especially if one is interviewing people, who were born in the middle of the century. While the time starting from the late 1950s could be generally

¹⁴ Aleksandra Sergeeva, Interview by Iuliia Skubytska, audio recording, Kharkiv, 02.04.2016.

¹⁵ Sergeeva.

viewed as stable in terms of access to food, the deprivations of the 1920s-1940s have affected people to the extent that those who have not experienced hunger still measure their level of well-being through access to food. This is supported by the fact that Soviet authorities were also very sensitive when it came to feeding the population and especially the children. Specifically, well into the 1980s, in the Soviet summer camps children were expected to gain weight and the camps were reporting on that.

The expression of dissatisfaction with the current situation through discussing food was also prominent in Valentina Annenkova's interview:

I.S. You said such an interesting thing, when you were talking about butter, that children had to eat 20 grams of butter, yes?

V.A. Yes, I am talking about butter because I, for example, don't remember, when was the last time I ate it. In our family, well, I do not have enough money to buy good butter. Back then, again, I am talking about later, when people's well-being improved, you can't compare people's well-being in the 1940s and 1980s. And when ... how to tell this to you, we all were well-fed, you understand. In childhood, I remember that I wanted to eat, when ... and there was not always something to eat. But at the grown-up age and later we were all well-fed. The trade union committee at my enterprise obliged you to take subsidized food in the canteen. Which means that for eight hryvnias you had to eat three times in the canteen.

I.S. Three times?

V.A. Three times with sour cream, with breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack, with pastry, milk, and so on. All of this was included into eight hryvnias, you understand. Meaning we were all well-fed, well-fed. Right now, children are all hungry, hungry. So, there was everything, cookies, gingerbread cookies, and different types of pastry were there, and all of this costed copecks, and everyone could buy it. Now children are going hungry. They come to me here and I always treat them with something.¹⁶

Like Aleksandra, Valentina goes into detail mentioning the tasty foods that she had access to in Soviet times. In her case, it is worth noting, however, that while she mentions lack of food in her childhood, she does not move on to compare that time with what is happening now. Moreover, she proceeds with saying:

V.A. When my granddaughter, I was taking her to school here, to the 50th school. We were riding a trolleybus and she told me: "Grandma tell me about how you were little. Tell me once again how they made you to drink a glass of milk and eat a bun." Obligatory during the long break...

I.S. Did they make you, I mean did they control whether you drank it?

V.A. Of course, of course they controlled it. We were so well-fed, we were well-fed. And my granddaughter was so hungry, that she said: "Grandma, tell me again, for the twentieth time, how you were hiding your bun in a desk, because you did not want to eat it. I would have eaten it straight away". Do you understand? This is the difference. What kind of children can grow up now? Children who want a bun, do you understand, he does not want something, he wants a bun, he wants a sweet.¹⁷

¹⁶ Valentina Annenkova, Interview by Iuliia Skubyt'ska, audio recording, Kharkiv, 07.01.2016.

¹⁷ Ibid.

In both Aleksandra and Valentina's stories, children are portrayed as wishing for material goods. In Aleksandra's narrative, however, their innocence gets corrupted by consumerism and to some extent they turn into perpetrators, who put pressure on their parents. In Valentina's narrative, children are helpless victims suffering from hunger and craving for any kind of food (even though she does not bring up lunch, but rather sweets, buns, or pastry). The focus on children is explained by the fact that the topic of the interviews with both women was Soviet childhood, and summer camps in particular. Yet, in both passages, my interviewees by themselves decide to establish comparisons between Soviet and contemporary childhood to show me how dissatisfied with current state of affairs they are. In both cases, food is used to show the absence of limitations in Aleksandra's and Valentina's lives. Through these passages, they also communicate that, in their perception, life was easier to comprehend (unbiased relationship with food, easy access to it) and safer (there were people and organizations who provided food, like family, school (state), or employer).

United and Happy

Another aspect of post-socialist life and political discourse that developed with the start of the war that my interviewees reacted to is the feeling of being singled out accompanied by increased social stratification. Through this lens, the famous Soviet "collective" so much cherished by the ideologues and hated by intelligentsia suddenly became a zone of comfort and security. The size of "the collective" varies from a class at school to the all-Union friendship of the peoples. Yet, the unity in it my interviewees now perceive as a benefit that provided emotional comfort in their everyday lives. The myth of unity takes different forms. For Varvara Klimenko, for example, the unity creates the presence of sense in life that is experienced personally and shared collectively:

V.K. Then, I remember, what we performed at the concert, we had puppets and we staged a puppet play. And I remember this so well, I was playing this character "Alioshka, Alioshka..." something like this, one moment, no, no, I don't remember... Oh, [sings] "Mother bought for Lesha great galoshes, real galoshes, beautiful and shiny..." and la-la-la, I don't remember the words. I remember these puppet theater, yes, those were real puppets. So it was like that. We danced, but I was not good at dancing. Yet, I sang, I remember the "Sun Circle." Friends made me a huge ball, you know like a drum, covered it with yellow paper. All of this was done very seriously, very scrupulously. We approached every event very scrupulously. This is what stayed in my memory. But in general, it was, I don't know, I liked it a lot. I am recollecting all this with such a delight. A lot of children are deprived of this now.

I.S. Well, yes, it is very expensive [sending children to a summer camp].

V.K. Yes, and what is more important, they are deprived of this communication and this idea that united us.

I.S. What was the idea that united you?

V.K. It united absolutely all the people, children and all people, this one idea that we were going to the bright future.

I.S. Ok. Did you feel that you were going to the bright future?

V.K. Well, please understand, I am not a typical representative, I was just fortunate. I felt this, I believed.

I.S. You believed in communism, and...

V.K. I believed.

I.S. In all of this.

V.K. One hundred percent.

I.S. Yes?

V.K. I was absolutely sure. Well, I don't want to say, I don't want to talk with these cliches, like "we are building communism" and so on. Yet, I believed that life would get better, and better. I did not know what it would be like, I just felt it, you know... And my feelings, they were based in these impres... well, on these facts, on these moments of my life. It wasn't all just out of the blue, somehow, just me fantasizing, I did see this.¹⁸

Pavel Rudnik approaches this topic of unity from a more theoretical angle in his reflections on the Soviet ideology:

P.R. I should say that Vladimir Ilich Lenin sensed the issues and he gave quite good assessments sometime. I cannot say this about all his ideas, but some assessments. He said, here is his phrase: "It is impossible to live in a society and be free from it." Humans are social beings. They live in a society. That is why if there is no some, well, when they say that we are going to live in an unideologized society, it's not true. If one ideology is absent, it will be replaced with another one. If there is no organized ideology grounded in certain humanitarian principles, like ten commandments or the code of the builder of communism – these reinterpreted ten commandments, or something like this, they are substituted by an ideology of the street, the crowd, the gang. This is what we see often now. A human or a society cannot be without an ideology. It is an either humanistic ideology or an ideology of profit, and, to some extent, oppression. This always exists, it exists in all ideologies, well, organizations, organization always presupposes the existence of some, the existence of organization, limitations. Well, and organization provides something positive, because organization let's say, protects the person helps the person somehow. On the other hand it also sets limits him, because when you are in the organization, you have to obey the laws of the monastery, in which... The proportion of these limitation and educational, let's say, humanitarian components, well, probably defines the image of this or that organization. But every organization has both.¹⁹

Unlike Alexandra, Pavel is rather careful, when he compares the Soviet Union to the current state of affairs preferring the first. He wraps his presentation in a highly theoretical discourse that makes the thought sound more authoritative and scientific. This can be a consequence of the fact that he is a professor at the local university or may be a discourse that he learned to sound compelling. The wrapping also leaves space for speculation, as Pavel does not provide a straightforward answer to the question he raises in this reflection. Despite this, the very fact that he brought up this comparison and the early comparison of ideologies suggests that he finds communist ideology more "humanistic" than what Ukraine has now, an unruly, spontaneous ideology of the crowd.

The unruliness is also a lens through which Valentina Annenkova perceives contemporary Ukrainian society:

I.S. [...] You were saying that marching was good, that it was useful

V.A. Naturally, it is good and useful.

I.S. Why? Again, now...

V.A. Why, I will explain you why.

¹⁸ Varvara Klimenko, Interview by Iuliia Skubytska, audio recording, Kharkiv, 05.11.2016.

¹⁹ Pavel Rudnik, Interview by Iuliia Skubytska, audio recording, Kharkiv, 10.03.2016.

I.S. I grew up without this.

V.A. I will explain you why. My daughter is working here as a theater group instructor. And in performing their functions in the theater, children do not know where the right and the left sides are. They can't walk and they don't know how to move. This is how far it goes. We al knew how to move, we all knew how to fulfill the orders. And it is very important to fulfill the orders in any job you are doing. I am telling you, when I pass past the school, it is painful to watch when they are taking children to the ballet school or to the painting school, it is painful. It is the teacher, then five or six moms, who cannot keep these children away from an accident. One could go mad from this. It wasn't like this. If we walked somewhere, we marched together. Our parents had never accompanied us. We obeyed the person who led us. And that person did not have a heart attack. So it this needed? Yes. Why is it not needed?

I.S. So this is the kind of discipline that provided for children's independence...

V.A. Naturally.

I.S. Their some kind of...

V.A. Naturally. It is first of all the discipline for children. And marching together does not mean parading o anything like that. It is the capability to execute the orders. In life, it is very important to execute the order, to know and understand that if you... The order is not just turn right, tun left, move forwards or move backwards. It is any task, a task is an order. On any production facility at any job if someone tells you to do something, you need to understand this order and execute it correctly. What is happening now is terrible.²⁰

At the end of our interview with Valentina, she once again returned to the topic of fulfilling the orders and enriched it with a few new details:

V.A. [...] So, you understand. Well, on the one hand it was marching, and on the other hand it was freedom, inner freedom. Yes we could shout [the summer camp counselors – I.S], we could discuss, we could do this and no one prohibited that. This was a norm of behavior. And yet, everyone was marching. Now it is not inner freedom, it is inner ugliness.²¹ I don't know how to call this feeling, when he is walking and cursing and everything. What is it? Is this inner freedom? This is ill-breeding, let us say. He does not know what he is allowed and not allowed to do, so you see...²²

The issue of people's disorientation because of the lack of a unifying idea is very prominent in all three interview excerpts and it expresses not a simply nostalgic feeling, but rather an identification of an answer to the problem what has gone wrong in the society my interviewees found themselves in. In some way, just like the rejection of victimhood, this is a suggestion of an alternative scenario for the building of Ukrainian political and economic culture that my interviewees produce based on their personal experience.

The proclaimed closeness to people and readiness to hear them was one of the Volodymyr Zeensky's campaign messages that made him so popular. His victory attests to the fact that in all regions of Ukraine people are more interested in being heard than in being told what they are from above. With Viatrovyeh losing his position as the head of the Institute of national Remembrance, it is still unclear what kind of memory policy the new Ukrainian leadership

²⁰ Annenkova.

²¹ She uses the word *bezobrazie*, which is directly translated as the absence of an image.

²² Annenkova.

will come up with. The biggest problem in this respect is that once again, the stated readiness to listen to the people is not supported by actions. It is nevertheless unfolding as a big TV show, as the recent presidential marathon with the journalists demonstrates. The question is how Ukrainians who supported Zelensky in an attempt to make their life in Ukraine more comfortable in economic and political terms will react to the show of listening that substitutes the actions they are longing for.

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