The "Lost Generation" of Ukraine:

Psychological Experiences of the Collapse of the USSR

and the Emergence of Ukrainian Independence

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Dedication and Acknowledgements

Так! я буду крізь сльози сміятись,	*Yes! I will laugh through the sadness,*
Серед лиха співати пісні,	*And I'll sing even though I'm distraught,*
Без надії таки сподіватись,	*I will hope even when it is hopeless,*
Буду жити! Геть думи сумні!	*I will live! Away, morbid thoughts!*
(Леся Українка, Contra Spem Spero)	*(Lesya Ukrayinka, Contra Spem Spero)*

To the people of Ukraine,

To the women who raised me,

To those I love.

I wouldn't be who I am now without you.

Preface

I was born in 1995, on a busy Monday morning in a hospital in Kyiv, Ukraine. When they filled out my birth certificate, there were many questions about my name, about who my father was; and, ultimately, whether the hole in my heart would heal and allow me to lead a healthy, active life.

There was no question about my nationality, though. I was born Ukrainian. Which, looking back on it, is a little weird: I am the least genetically Ukrainian person in my current living family. 23andme told me I was almost half-Western and Northern European, given my father's Scandinavian heritage. But I was born Ukrainian. There was no question about that.

At school, along with my classmates, equally Ukrainian, I would learn things about the history of my country; its rich artistic reserves; its literature, and its blood-stained past. To put it simply, when my Spanish boyfriend decided to take up reading a book on the history of Ukraine, he called me and said, "you know, your country has been raped and pillaged by everyone." I told him yes, I told him I had to learn the years and the dates of this and that conquering, this and that annexation, this and that establishment of a foreign government. I learned about the injustices that the XX century had brought, along with years of repression, secrecy, and starvation.

I was and to this day remain fascinated with North Korea, which to me, appears almost like a time capsule of the time in which the elder generations of my living maternal family had developed. Recently, I had the pleasure of finally visiting Chernobyl – the site of the biggest disaster in nuclear history, and the almost trans-generational resentment and sadness that I felt upon realizing that my country's entire system had been built on systematic repression and lies, had never felt so real. I finally saw tangible proof, encased in a concrete sarcophagus along with the deadliest imaginable dose of radioactive material and debris.

My mother and my grandmother never learned that in school. Neither did they learn Ukrainian poetry, nor did they speak about the achievements of Ukrainian science. The history they learned was of a very different sort – it was Soviet history. It was the history of a country attempting to appear as a communist utopia, wherein the fifteen nations of the USSR had all stood as one, and there had been no dispute about the glory of Soviet symbols.

My mother was born in the Soviet Union, in 1963. She went to school in a little aproned uniform and a red scarf, and she sang the Soviet anthem. She never learned about Stalin's repressions after World War II, the Crimean Tatar genocide of 1942, or the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine. To this day, she does not know the full extent of the damage the Chernobyl disaster had inflicted upon the young people of her generation. All those things were shrouded in secrecy and censored to promote the image of communist stability.

She knew, of course, what the KGB and NKVD had been – but no more than what was said in whispers, muttered under people's breaths and caught on radio waves of the Voice of America in the kitchen, with the volume set to the lowest possible setting. She grew up in a country based on principles one might consider outdated in this day and age. Tourists flock to places like North Korea for that specific purpose: to get an inside view on a country entrenched in its past, in paradigms and dogmas of a regime that has perhaps exhausted itself and is now fighting for survival through instruments of repression.

The Soviet Union lost this fight. On December 8, 1991, the Belavezha Accords were signed declaring the dissolution of the USSR; and on December 26, the USSR ceased to exist as a country following Declaration 142-H of the Soviet of the Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union (Alimzhanov, 1991). The fragments of the Union later went on to become their own independent states. Ukraine was one of them. My mother was born in the

Soviet Union; she got her university diploma in the Soviet Union; then, the bubble burst, and she became a citizen of a different country.

But how different was it? How different was it to have lived and been preparing for a life in a country based on collectivist planning and communal responsibility, and suddenly, to wake up in a completely different state with a different flag, a different anthem, and, more importantly, an entirely different economic and psychological setup?

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Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in a new era of economic, political, and psychological experiences. This thesis aims to explore the psychological precursors and consequences of the collapse for the "Lost Generation" of Ukraine – the people who at the time had been born in the USSR but due to geopolitical shifts, ended up working and becoming adults in a separate, independent Ukraine.

This study involved the thematic analysis of five interviews collected with participants from the "Lost Generation" of Ukraine. The resulting themes are classified into three categories: confronting the collapse (darkness, uncertainty, and anticipation of change), surviving the collapse (oracle foreigners, business as savior, and survival), and Ukrainian identity and division (identity and East/West divide).

The research concludes that the discussion of the Ukrainian identity, the identity of the Lost Generation, and the combination and synergy of the two, cannot be fully extracted from the historical, socioeconomic, and political context due to these identities' close connection to external factors and influences. This thesis provides an outlook on what kinds of shifts national and personal identities undergo when the external environment becomes destabilized.

Keywords: Ukraine, nationalism, patriotism, national identity, national consciousness.

Chapter 1: Introduction (Literature Review)

To fully understand the context of the thematic analysis presented in this study, it is essential also to understand the historical and sociopolitical context surrounding the existence and the fall of the Soviet Union. Therefore, a short introduction is needed to capture the scope of the events presented and to back up the analysis of the emerging themes.

The History at Hand

The fall. One cannot argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred precisely on the day of the signing of the Belavezha Accords or even when 142-H went into effect. Rome was not built in one day – the collapse was a lengthy process, triggered by various factors including economic instability, increasing access to Western press and goods, glasnost, perestroika, and several crucial events that launched civic responsibility and allowed the citizens and party members of the USSR to rebel against the communist regime.

In 1922, Lenin declared the formation of the USSR and Ukraine inevitably became part of it. Starting with Stalin's ascension to power, Ukraine began to lose its position as a founding country and soon became subject to various social and political injustices. Those included the collectivization of 1932-1934, the Stalinist Terror of 1937-1938 (in which the NKVD recorded 123,421 executions in Soviet Ukraine), World War II in which Ukrainians suffered both from Nazi advances and Soviet persecution, to name a few (Shore, 2017).

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power. He introduced new policies that aimed to put an end to the Cold War and revive the economy after Brezhnev's years of stagnation. Perestroika, a concept well known even in the West, according to him was a "conference of development of democracy, socialist self-government, encouragement of initiative and creative endeavor, improved order and discipline, more glasnost, criticism, and self-criticism in all spheres of our society. It is utmost respect for the individual and consideration for personal dignity" (Gorbachev, 1987). However, this policy, which included another well-

known concept, glasnost, which was supposed to enable free press in particular, clashed with the half-decade-old Soviet system of secrecy, censorship, and rationing out information to the population.

Gorbachev's government changes were partially triggered by another significant event which some tout as the beginning of the end for the USSR – the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Accident of 1986. Investigations of the accident, one of the most catastrophic nuclear meltdowns of all time, revealed years of cover-ups by the KGB masking flaws in the construction project of Unit 4, as well as human error and negligence. What is more, the accident was not initially reported to the general public both domestically and internationally, triggered the distrust of the Soviet government on the part of its citizens and the international community (The Chernobyl Forum, 2005). To this day, the true extent of the cover-up and the subsequent health risks that stem from the disaster and the government's silence have not been studied.

Following several years of semi-successful trial and error, the Soviet Union finally exhausted itself. An unsuccessful coup in August 1991 made it abundantly clear that the USSR was to be no more. This coup effectively triggered the replacement of Gorbachev by Yeltsin, as well as sending ripples throughout the rest of the Soviet nations (Office of the Historian, n.d.). In Ukraine, the referendum on the Act of Declaration of Independence showed that an overwhelming majority of the voters – 92.3% – approved the decision and a new president, Leonid Kravchuk, was elected (Nohlen & Stover, 2010).

Independent Ukraine. On August 24, 1991, the Supreme Council of Ukraine declared the former Soviet republic's independence from the USSR. In the days that followed, the newly-formed parliament began taking its first steps towards the construction of a new independent democratic state (Lapychak, 1991). What the euphoric crowd celebrating the

formation of a new country did not know, was that the months that followed were bound to change their lives forever.

After the USSR collapsed, there was a "dramatic deterioration of the economic situation during the first years of independence" which, according to some scholars, had "negatively affected the ethnic situation in Ukraine" (Juska, 1999). Apart from Russia, which had inherited most of the Soviet legacy, the governments of all newly-formed independent states set out to define post-Soviet identities in their citizens by introducing new state symbols, currencies, languages, changing street names, and adopting new attitudes towards the Soviet past (Nourkova & Brown, 2015).

From the economic standpoint, there was a budget crisis and inflation, which led to a sharp decline in the wages of professionals in the social sector and education, as well as the working class. New occupations emerged in the areas of trade, mediation, and intellectual and bureaucratic services. In Russia (and other former Soviet states), professionalized occupations which had been prominent in the USSR lost their prestige. Engineers, school teachers, doctors, workers from thousands of Scientific Research Institutes, the so-called *budjetniki* ("state workers") lost their prestige and with it, their employability (Abramov, 2016). Thousands of young professionals, who had trained in universities and institutes to become active participants of the state-mandated and planned economy, lost sight of their future – as with the Soviet system, disappeared the certainty they had had in their careers. Out of desperation, many former engineers and skilled workers started to sell clothing and household goods from neighboring countries on markets, going back and forth from places like Poland to Ukrainian marketplaces and back. Others turned to requalification courses to take up other professions, which only began to emerge in a shaky, ruble-bound *kupon* economy.

Some, like Ignatieff (1993), might argue that, in retrospect, that "independence has done nothing for the economy" and that the rhetoric of nationhood is merely lip-service, feeding misguided hopes and dreams of young professionals who had fallen victim to the economic consequences of independence at the time. Ukrainians had been told they would have their passports and currency; till then, they were forced to make do with a transitional, non-convertible currency which was still tied to the Russian ruble. The savvier ones turned to the dollar, which virtually divided the country and its economy into two zones: the dollar and the *kupon,* ruble-bound zone.

A study on values consciousness in post-Soviet Russia revealed that Russian people score high on "materialism," since for too long, material needs had been unsatisfied in times of communism and deficit (Gaskova, 2014). Additionally, personal initiative and individualism were condemned in the USSR but were now gaining traction. Though Ukraine is by no means comparable to Russia due to the various historical differences – the starkest one being that of positions of power and the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized, similarities in materialistic tendencies are readily observable between many countries of the former Soviet bloc.

East/West Divide. Overall, the moods of nationhood in the country after the fall were divided, according to Ignatieff (1993). Though children began learning about Shevchenko as they had done about Pushkin in Soviet times, though Moscow's former authority over Ukrainians had become in their schoolbooks and national rhetoric a yoke which had dragged the country down for centuries, there was no developed model of nationality. In Western Ukraine, nationalism was more prominent due to their previous history under Poland. Being a European there meant not being Russian; it meant being an individual and having personal agency and responsibility. In Eastern Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula, which were far more russified, there were remnants of Soviet identity which longed for the good old days.

Due to the large number of Russians in Eastern Ukraine, the feeling of newly found Ukrainian identity and freedom was far smaller.

This distinction between East and West becomes prominent when one examines sociopolitical and personal identities. Juska (1999) writes that the emerging opposition to the colonial rule of the USSR and the further creation of the administration of an independent state in Ukraine were based on a fragile agreement between Ukrainian-speaking nationalists in the West and ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the East. However, the author continues to write that these ethnic transformations brought about certain tensions in relation to globalization and the collapse of the communist system. For example, most ethnic Russians supported independence for economic reasons, and after the economy began to stagnate, pro-Russian sentiments reared their heads in the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine. The effects of this are most prominently felt today, whereby pro-Russian attitudes led to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Eastern Ukraine.

Overall, the tendency among the older generation was to gravitate towards the nostalgia of the USSR, while the younger people seemed to resent that. One of the people Marci Shore interviewed for her 2017 book on the Revolution of Dignity claims that he sensed that the fall of the USSR was reminiscent of the Exodus – that the Ukrainian people would have to wander for 40 years in the desert to wait until the old generation with the values of slaves had died out (Shore, 2017).

The language issue. One of the most prominent issues that I believe should be touched upon is the issue of language. As mentioned before, though there is a divide between Eastern and Western Ukraine, one being more Russian-speaking and the other more Ukrainian-speaking respectively; there is a unique bilingualism to the people of Ukraine that is quite striking to someone not accustomed to the culture. In general, there is a casual bilingualism

that exists in everyday communication, whereby it is normal for conversations to happen in two languages (Shore, 2017). In the recent years, this kind of casual code-switching has also invited English into the mix: words like *trend, consulting*, and even *fidget spinner* were transported from the English language and are now casually inserted in between the mishmash of Ukrainian and Russian.

   A note on the use of language in this research. The way Ukrainians use language will also become apparent in the research done for this thesis: besides code-switching, or using different languages within the same discourse, it should be noted that the people interviewed adhere to a tendency for symbolic and metaphoric language. In the researcher's experience, this kind of language is used every day in casual conversation and therefore, some of the words used which may appear emotionally "heavy" to the Western perspective are actually less emotionally impactful in Ukrainian and Russian. Thus, the gravity of a code used by the participants may fluctuate depending on the cultural perspective from which research is conducted.

National Identity and Its Facets

   The definitions of national identities, as well as nations, are as multifaceted and varied as there are political scientists and ethnology scholars. In broad terms, according to Smith, a nation is "a named community possessing a historic territory, shared myths and memories, a common public culture and common laws and customs" (2002). The same author earlier defined five fundamental attributes of what constitutes a national identity; those being: a historic territory/homeland, common myths and historic memories, a common public culture, common legal rights and duties for all members, and a common economy with territorial mobility for all members (Smith, 1991). Both of these definitions are textbook and, when applied to the subject of this research, flawed. The Ukrainian nation has had its roots entrenched in thousands of years of history; however, it is also a nation that had barely had its

own state until 1991. Would that mean that until 1991, Ukrainians had no nation or national identity? Would that mean that this identity changed depending on who ruled Ukraine at a given historical period? Would that mean, in essence, that the diversity of the Soviet Union's fifteen member-states had been, in reality, a lie, and the cartoonish uniformity with which Hollywood at the time had used to depict the Soviet Block, had been reflective of the national tendencies at large?

These questions are the reason why I believe it essential to examine national identity not as a moment in time; but rather, as a continuum with a temporal dimension – a dimension which allows national identities their fluidity and malleability. A study by Mummendey et al. (2001) demonstrated that thinking about one's country along the temporal dimension primed patriotism; while comparing a country to other contemporary countries primed a nationalistic identity. What is the difference between the two and what does it mean? In the words of the great George Orwell,

> "Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism… By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality" (1945).

The issue of patriotism and nationalism and their opposition is a large one in Ukrainian society – particularly since the Euromaidan revolution in 2013-2014. Nationalists were a dominant driving force during the events on Maidan and later went on to form their own regiments in the war on the Donbass. However, their nationalist doctrine, which, in most cases, stems from the OUN-UPA (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian

Insurgent Army) nationalism of the first half of the twentieth century, has drawn extensive criticism and been compared to other historical far-right movements, e.g., Nazism (Rudling, 2013).

And thus, according to all the research cited above, the longitudinal examination of nationality-centric narratives is vital to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the person's relation to their country's history, their country's present and, by extension, their relationship to other nation-states.

What is more, personal identity has also been proven to rely on continuity. Personal stories develop and change with the passage of time. As the person gets older, their understanding of the world and what constitutes their identity changes (McLean, 2008).

Continuity is also an important factor when examining previous research on the subject of the collapse – a single study by Nourkova & Brown (2015) demonstrated that the singular event of the collapse of the USSR did not figurate significantly in personal narratives of Russian, Azerbaijani and Uzbek subjects unless it had somehow altered their life course in a fundamental way. The same study also found that the collapse had a more significant psychological impact on Uzbek and Azerbaijani subjects due to the reintroduction of the local language, the provision of new currencies etcetera, which had to take please, leading to re-ethnificaion. This poses the question whether the same can be said for personal narratives in Ukraine.

Therefore, when looking at personal narratives, including those related to nationalism and national identification, it is essential to consider the passage of time, as well as the historical context of the person's narrative. Therefore, this study will focus on a considerable period of time, which brought about many significant changes in rapid succession – all this to gain a better understanding of where the "Lost Generation" was at the beginning of their

narrative, which roads they traveled, and, ultimately, where they find themselves as of the moment of writing this thesis.

Research Problem

This study explores the themes surrounding the participants' experience as the "Lost Generation" of Ukraine, the people who were young professionals during the fall of the Soviet Union. The research will explore their past emotional experiences relating to the fall of the USSR, as well as the development of their national and personal identities in the light of Ukrainian independence and the collapse of the Soviet System. This research will also be focusing on the linguistic nuances used by the interviewees to highlight their experience.

The research cited above provides insight in the economic and sociopolitical domains of the collapse of the USSR, but there is virtually nothing in the literature concerning the psychological influence of the fall on those who had experienced it. The psychological impact of the USSR's dissolution is essential to account for when counseling people of this age group, not just in Ukraine, but possibly clients from other former USSR countries.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Design

This study was centered around semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants one-on-one with the help of electronic means (Skype) and face-to-face.

The interviews were organized individually and conducted one-on-one between the researcher and the subjects. One interview per participant was conducted. Before the beginning of the interview, verbal and signed consent was obtained from the participants.

The interviews lasted up to an hour (60 minutes) long. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner around various topics which were pertinent to the participants' experience of the fall of the USSR and the development of their own national and personal

identities. The topics included personal growth, emotional experiences of the collapse, resilience in going forward with one's life, their professional careers and the changes they had or did not have to make in order to become an economic participant in society, their feelings towards the independent state of Ukraine as an idea and a tangible concept (whether they feel attached to Ukraine as a country, in the patriotic and nationalistic sense of the word), as well as their current experience of their past as the Lost Generation.

I, as the researcher, took into account that given the current political and economic climate in Ukraine, the conversation could veer off to the surge in nationalism in Ukraine since the beginning of the Crimean Crisis of 2014. This topic was also narrowly addressed in the light of the problem of interest; however, the primary focus was on the experience of 1990-1991 and emerging independent Ukraine henceforth.

The interviews were coded and analyzed using qualitative package software (Dedoose) for themes related to the topic of interest.

Participants

The participants were referred by word-of-mouth and requested by the researcher to attend the interviews of their own volition using snowball sampling due to the nature of the study to gather as much relevant information as possible and due to the qualitative nature of the research and the specifics of the inclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria for the sample included being a legal resident or citizen of Ukraine, as well as having been a legal resident or citizen of Ukraine during the early 1990's and having experienced the fall of the USSR in that time.

Additionally, the participants should have been in their young adulthood to their mid-thirties in 1990-1991, putting their current age at around their mid-forties to their sixties. The rationale for this was that the participants, as described in the literature above, would

theoretically have experienced the political and socioeconomic impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union in a way that is different to the older/younger generations.

The sample included four female and one male participant. Four of the participants were currently living in Kyiv, the capital; and one lived in the city of Dnipro in Eastern Ukraine. Of the five participants, at the time of the collapse, one of them was living in Kyiv, two in Western Ukraine and two in Eastern Ukraine. As the interviews were conducted in Ukrainian (2) or Russian (3), a knowledge of these languages was also included in the inclusion criteria.

Table 1 - Participant Demographics

Participant #	Residence in 1991	Current Residence	Occupation in 1991	Current Occupation	Preferred Language
1	Kyiv	Kyiv	English language and literature teacher	Sales	Russian
2	Dorohobych (Western Ukraine)	Kyiv	University student	Translator	Ukrainian
3	Dnipro (Eastern Ukraine)	Dnipro	University student	Production	Russian
4	Mariupol (Eastern Ukraine)	Kyiv	University student	Management	Russian
5	Chudniv (Western Ukraine)	Kyiv	English and German language teacher	Consulting business	Ukrainian

Due to the nature of the study, to sensitize the reader to the participants' unique characteristics, the participants' demographic information is described in the report, thus presenting the information collected in context, as recommended by Seidman (1998).

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews was transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. The audio was then destroyed. This data was later analyzed for themes using

qualitative methods and Dedoose, a qualitative/mixed-methods package software. The data uploaded to Dedoose were protected with an account password, as well as an encryption password for this specific project.

This research was not based on any assumption or theory; therefore, the theme analysis was exploratory. The themes were analyzed across study participants.

This report will include a detailed account of a group of emerging themes surrounding various aspects addressed in the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Chapter 3: Results

The thematic analysis spanned five interviews and involved working with them not only through the lens of psychology and narrative interpretation, but also working with sources on history, political science, and economics. Therefore, the division of these themes would require the creating of overarching categories in order to make the analysis more coherent and easy to understand.
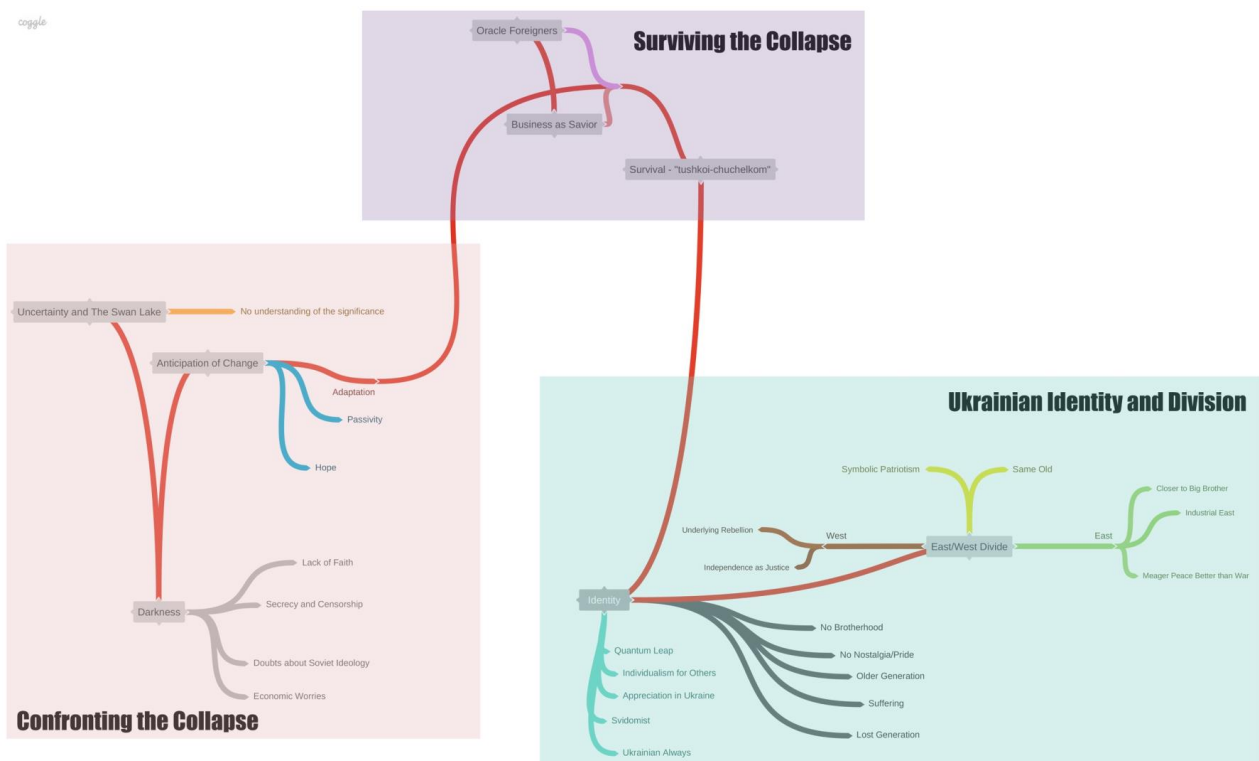

Figure 1 – Thematic Map

The general categories are as follow: a) Confronting the Collapse – the precursors and consequences of the fall of the Soviet Union and its immediate aftermath; b) Surviving the Collapse – the psychological and sociopolitical experience of a frayed and fragmented fledgling state; c) Ukrainian Identity and Division – themes relating to the consequences the history of the Ukrainian people and collapse of the Soviet Union had for the concept of Ukrainian identity and its divided nature in terms of language, geography, and mindset (see appendix for a more detailed thematic map).

Category 1: Confronting the Collapse

This thematic category has to do with the pre-existing conditions and the immediate consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union for the people of Ukraine in the sociopolitical and economic senses through the prism of personal experience. The overarching themes included in this category are that of darkness, uncertainty, and anticipation of change; each of which carry a unique place in the personal and political timelines of the event that was the fall of the Soviet Union.

Core theme 1: Darkness. The first theme, both chronologically and conceptually, is that of darkness. Darkness features heavily in the discourse of the interviewees: both metaphorical and literal darkness of unlit streets and houses, related to economic breakdowns and an overall deficit of everyday goods and food.

> "…but as an overall memory, I have those, you know, dark streets, unlit lobbies… endless queues…"

This theme, associated by the interviewees with the pre-collapse Soviet days, is closely related to various aspects of the crumbling, no longer sustainable way of life, among which
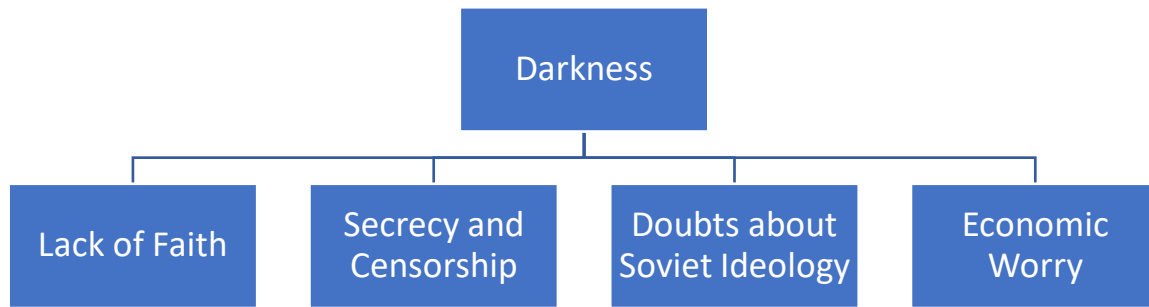
the more starkly identified ones were:

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                        ┌──────────────┐
                        │   Darkness   │
                        └──────┬───────┘
        ┌──────────────┬───────┴───────┬──────────────┐
┌───────┴──────┐┌──────┴───────┐┌──────┴───────┐┌──────┴───────┐
│ Lack of Faith ││  Secrecy and ││  Doubts about ││   Economic   │
│              ││  Censorship  ││Soviet Ideology ││    Worry     │
└──────────────┘└──────────────┘└──────────────┘└──────────────┘
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Figure 2 – Darkness Theme and Subthemes

a) the increasing lack of faith in a broken sociopolitical system which could no longer sustain a more open, westward-looking economy;

b) the growing resentment and lack of trust in a government shrouded in secrecy and censorship, as well as the increasing sense of Ukrainian autonomy that brought about conversations of historically forced assimilation of the Ukrainian people into the Soviet nation;

c) the developing skepticism towards collectivism and Soviet ideals as a whole;

d) and economic worries which were becoming more and more pressing each day as people struggled to put food on the table.

Lack of Faith. The Lost Generation seems not to have believed in the very system they had grown up in. No matter whether they came from the more nationalist West or, the more socialist East of Ukraine, all of the interviewees appear to agree on the idea that the Soviet system had exhausted itself at the time of the pre- and post-collapse. The fall of the USSR seemed as the next logical step to them. The system, according to them, was broken in many ways; interestingly enough, two ways in which it personally manifested for the interviewees were concerning education and the mass media. In the former case, education was unsustainable to them because of its ties to the goal of enriching the Soviet Union – which

meant that it completely missed the mark later, making it harder for them to excel

professionally in the more open world post-collapse:

> "Yes, they got an outstanding engineering education. But it was too academic; it was never applied. So… the best education was theoretical, and there were engineering and technical human resources, but they were either oriented towards defense industries, which later fell apart because in general they were all tied to the entire Soviet Union and the USSR's defense doctrine…"

With this kind of education, the Lost Generation had little hope regarding employment

in a more globalized, less theoretical and defense-focused world post-collapse. Considering

the centrality of economic and political concerns in their lives, it was a huge deal, leading to

disillusionment, depressive states, and other problems in their personal and public lives.

Though the knowledge they had gotten in Soviet schools and universities was prized, with its

exhaustiveness and its depth in the theoretical sense, it had to be heavily altered and adapted

to a new kind of framework, which this new generation had to do by themselves without any

kind of guidance:

> "I studied, I got an academic degree. A dead language and so on, which I had to rejuvenate, because the English people I first came to contact with during my fourth or fifth year [of university], I don't remember, they were shocked that we spoke very beautifully, very correctly, but it was very [in English] outdated […] That was characteristic of that generation, that there was a base, but what to do with it? Bury it like a pyramid, upside down, or build it upward and claw our way up."

Secrecy and censorship. Upon the collapse of the USSR, the Ukrainian people were

confronted with a new kind of reality – a more open, de-classified kind of reality which the

Lost Generation were quick to believe, mostly because of a thirst for more knowledge of the

outside world.

As it were, "historical independence was a foreign concept to us, it was something that

existed either in ancient history, or it was a piece [of history] and was silenced in historical

calendars of the time." The idea of a separate, autonomous Ukrainian state was difficult for

them to grasp due to years of political repressions and censorship which had only begun to be

lifted during Gorbachev's years in power – but true Glasnost only came later, after the collapse of the USSR. It should be noted, though, that the Lost Generation in general claim they found it easier to adapt to this kind of new, open, independent world than their parents or teachers – in part because their indoctrination was not as deeply-rooted.

Information had to be smuggled into the country like any other commodity that wasn't readily available under the regime – counterfeit radios were used to listen to wavelengths that were being jammed. This kind of counterfeit listening is associated with a feeling of newness and excitement for them, but also a more profound, darker sense of doubt. One of the interviewees remembered only beginning to question the Soviet Union's involvement in Afghanistan after listening to foreign, "enemy voices."

> "We had an old radio, a Japanese radio, which allowed us to listen to the *Voice of America* […] On the one hand, our reality: flags, the Party, the Komsomol, the people and so on. On the other hand, I saw a completely different picture and came up with a lot of questions to which nobody would give me an answer. Yes? So, there were no answers, and you were likely to be told to shut up."

One of the most important examples of how secrecy and censorship featured in the narrative of the Lost Generation is the discussion surrounding the explosion of the Chernobyl Power Plant in 1986. The people interviewed, no matter which part of Ukraine they had been at the time, all remember several days of complete silence from the government – they weren't told about the catastrophe and the possible nuclear threat to their health until much later. All the while, firefighters, and soldiers from all over the country were sent to work on liquidating the consequences of the accident. All of this created an atmosphere of uncertainty, fear, and a general lack of trust in what they were being told from all sides. As a phenomenon, it is interesting because they had to act counterintuitively and believe not the "friendly" voices of state-sponsored television, as per the Soviet dogma, but instead turned to news coming from the side of the enemy capitalist west:

"Chernobyl [..] was frightening because many of my mother's and father's friends, both dead and living now, were sent to the Chernobyl Power Plant. As emergency responders. It was confusing because it wasn't announced, it wasn't talked about. Those who listened to the *Voice of America* understood what was happening a lot better."

Historical censorship gained a broader, darker significance in the West of Ukraine, where nationalism was much more abundant, as was the Soviet reactionary policies of nationalization and assimilation. With Glasnost and the subsequent partial opening of NKVD and KGB archives to the public, resentment grew among the young people those whose families had been touched by the regime throughout the 20th century during the mass repressions in Western Ukraine, "which were essentially a shock to many people. Back then, every page that was made accessible to many people was… a cultural and social shock." The youth in Western Ukraine, in general, was very politically active and conscious. When the blow of historical truth landed, the knee-jerk reflex was a reactionary, somewhat aggressive nationalist movement that to this day, continues to be a subject of controversy in the rest of Ukraine, but not among the participants interviewed from the West. Therefore, my Western interviewees say, the collapse of the USSR in Western Ukraine was more readily accepted as retribution and justice by those whose conspiracy theories at the time of the USSR turned out to be true.

Doubts about Soviet ideology. Resentment among the Lost Generation toward Soviet doctrine begins, in most cases, with bureaucracy and the conviction that the political system they had grown up in existed solely to support the growing appetites of the party nomenclature. What was more, the ideology was comfortable in the way that older people who had grown up in the USSR rarely felt the need to ask questions? However, that was not the case for the generation in this study. As mentioned before, doubt and questioning became fuel for negative feelings towards the Soviet government and the way of life and for curiosity

towards exploring alternatives to it – which, at the time, was the capitalism of the world beyond the Iron Curtain.

The younger people, students at the time, chose to question what was happening around them, posing uncomfortable inquiries and subsequently suffering the consequences:

> "This student hung a yellow-and-blue flag with the trident in some building. He was expelled from the Institute […] There was public condemnation. I remember there was a general assembly on the parade ground…"

What also made it easier for the younger people to not fall under the lull of ideology was the fact that the system itself was crumbling, and they were fully conscious of it. They claim that the Komsomol no longer held as much significance in their lives and the broader social context as it had before, school and university organizations were defunded and disbanded. Foreign media outlets became more readily available – mostly illegally at the time, offering views that were radically different to those posed by state television, and the overall feeling of contempt and resentment toward the ideological pillars of the Soviet Union took over, allowing for a new outlook on the future of the crumbling state.

Economic worries. Economic concerns, in general, are shown to play a very significant role in the discontent of the younger generation. As students and budding professionals, they craved to access the outside world more and did it mostly through the contraband purchase of foreign goods, such as Levi's jeans and various electronics. To own something that came from outside the USSR, or better yet, to go outside the USSR to faraway places like Israel or the US, was a dream and a matter of discussion and awe.

Emotional difficulties came in the shape of empathetic pain and fear of the future based on what they saw the older generation go through after the collapse when people with doctorates and formerly high-paying jobs were forced to downgrade to menial labor and small commerce:

"I remember that everyone ended up at the market. You could see your teachers, former and future teachers, at the market… other respectable people […] You could sell whatever you had. There was a bartering system, and people exchanged what they had. Some got their salaries in toilets or sinks, and they traded them for other things or sold them for money."

Inflation and growing unemployment, which began in the 80's and started to gain momentum until and after the collapse of the USSR, continued to grow beyond expectations – until, according to one interviewee, "the only way was up because we had already completely hit the ultimate low." Though for most people, the "ultimate low" would be seen as a negative thing, this generation instead saw it as an opportunity – and an experience to base their growth on.

Despite the tumulus historical shifts that were happening around the time, interestingly enough, the people interviewed weren't quick to blame the current government for their economic difficulties – instead, they tended to focus on their predecessors. One example given was the unsustainable agricultural industry, in which, according to one of the interviewees, crops, though abundant, were left to rot because of a lack of technological backbone to help preserve and support the annual yields. Surprisingly enough, this example seems to illustrate the overall mood of the interviews. People spoke of huge potentials, of vast possibilities of the Soviet economy, agriculture, and industry. However, they cited a lack of hope in this potential because they were aware of the shortage of resources and, for lack of a better term, *smarts* of the Soviet government and the people involved, to make use of this potential.

However, the fall happened, leading to an interesting shift in the theme of darkness. Though it remained a constant throughout the Soviet and then the post-Soviet experience, it became more mobile after the collapse – things "started moving," there was a new push for

people to take advantage of this ruin and to create something from it. The Lost Generation was at the helm of this creation.

Core theme 2: Uncertainty and The Swan Lake. Another central theme is that of uncertainty. This word riddled the tales of the people I interviewed. Whether they were talking about their experience of living in the Soviet Union, where information was precious and hard to come by, or the experience of the collapse, when day to day, things shifted and changed in politics, economics, and the consciousness of the people; or even when they spoke to me about their outlook on the future today, 26 years later.

While most people spoke of uncertainty as something unpleasant, evoking a feeling of unsettlement, unrest, and "disorientation," they also referred to this lack of clarity as "catastrophic" and "absolute," meaning that it permeated many layers of societal functioning and what was more, there appeared to be very few things people could do to potentially get more information. Uncertainty, for all of my interviewees, was associated with fear – they could not prepare themselves for what was coming if they didn't know what was happening:

> "An absolute lack of understanding what would happen. An utter lack of understanding. I remember very well that they played the "Swan Lake" [when the decision was being made, state television played the "Swan Lake" ballet on repeat] and the feeling that absolutely nothing was definite. Something was happening. Fear, caution… There was probably no comprehension that something could change dramatically."

However, an interesting caveat to uncertainty in the context of the collapse specifically is that for most of them, uncertainty was also a product and a precursor for passivity – just as there was no helping this lack of information, there was also nothing to do without the information. Very few decided to seek it out – in their texts. Instead, information and clarity are two passive things:

> "If it happens, it happens, and nobody knew what we separated from, what we separated for, what the consequences would be, why independence…"

In a way, it appears as though during the collapse of the Soviet Union, amidst the turmoil and the darkness described above, the people involved expected history to run its course without having to engage with it necessarily. The subject of passivity is something that will be touched on later – as it is not exclusive only to the theme of uncertainty.

No understanding of the significance. As a product of uncertainty, there was also a lack of understanding of the grandiosity of what was happening. The people I interviewed seemed to agree on the fact that there was no real assessment in the minds of the people as to the scope of what was happening and what it meant for their society and their families. The historical significance of the events surrounding the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent appearance of independent states was lost in the more personal concerns of the people involved at the time:

> "…independence was a foreign concept to us, it was something that existed either in ancient history, or it was a piece [of history] and was silenced in historical calendars of the time."

The idea of such a radical change in the system that had more or less survived intact since the October Revolution was also beyond the comprehension of the people who were born in this system and knew very little about anything outside of it. They agree on this idea as "abstract," and that there were no strong emotions associated with the collapse because many people at the time seemed to think that no real change would happen:

> "To be honest, I tried to get inside my head and remember if I had any thoughts, emotions, understanding of the overall grandiosity of what was happening; I don't think so."

Interestingly enough, the people who were slightly younger at the time, fresh out of school and into their first year at university, and coincidentally were both from Eastern Ukraine, the part that was more economically dependent on the Russian center of the USSR,

claim they weren't mature enough at the time to understand what was happening – despite the fact that their parents' jobs would be directly affected by this shift:

> "Today, kids at 18 years of age understand political changes. We, who grew up in the Soviet Union… No. We didn't have that. Those who were 25 in '91, those were more realistic about everything and probably had more of an understanding of what could happen. We didn't analyze the situation back then. We didn't get it."

Overall, the idea of the Soviet Union not existing anymore as they knew it appeared to be ludicrous and the unrest surrounding the coup and protests in Moscow were more of a singular event in the minds of the young people at the time. Perhaps it was this mentality that eventually led to an even more profound lack of clarity during the formative years of the fledgling years of an independent Ukraine.

Core theme 3: Anticipation of change. By far one of the most significant themes to come up in the interviews was that the change was expected, if not anticipated.
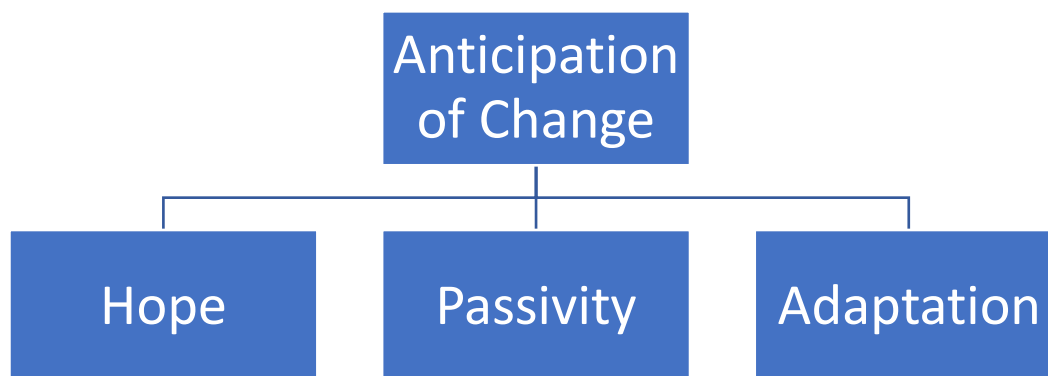
Figure 3 – Anticipation of Change Theme and Subthemes

It is quite interesting, when examined together with the previous theme of uncertainty. The conclusion is that the people felt that *something* had to change, but how it would happen, why, and what it would eventually lead to seemed less precise and more into the realm of "we will think about it later." Everyone seemed to have an idea that something was bound to happen:

> "…it was a more or less natural process, but it wasn't elevated to anything."

This feeling of anticipation appeared to be stronger in Western Ukraine, where nationalist moods and underground organizations served to boost the idea of independence and the collapse of communism in Ukraine:

> "…the processes that happened, the ones we observed […] in student circles, there was already a broad discussion around what could be next, where this could lead, so […] I remember, when Gorbachev was besieged at his dacha in Crimea… and this extraordinary circumstance happened, then it was already clear that… processes were happening that could lead to some sort of collapse of the system at the time."

Another factor related to anticipation of change was that everyone seems to agree that just like Rome wasn't built in one day, the collapse of the Soviet Union was more of a process than a singular, one-time event. Though it appears hard to pinpoint when exactly the collapse began to happen, most of the interviewees agree that the system had been doomed to fail at a certain point and that Gorbachev's more Westernized, inclusive approach to the communist regime seemed to bolster and catalyze the downfall of the USSR:

> "But you can't say that it happened in '91. When Gorbachev came to power, sometime starting around '85… that was when we started to realize that… it wasn't the Soviet Union anymore. It was something different; there was a sort of transformation […] I wouldn't say that '91 was the breaking point. It was the final straw, but the breaking point happened before. Definitely before that."

Hope. Despite the lack of a foreseeable future, this anticipation of change is also closely tied to hope in many cases – a reactionary kind of hope in which the "ultimate low" had already been hit; therefore, the only way out was to believe that the change which would come would be good. Most of the hope expressed by the interviewees was in connection to the economy – only because people had too many materialistic concerns at the time to want to strive for achievement in other areas. Money and jobs took precedence.

When the economic default hit, there was an air of positivity about it – or rather, its temporary nature, in the minds of the people:

> "Nobody got depressed because everyone had the conviction that this wasn't for long."

Interestingly, these hopes ended up coming true to a certain degree: when the economy became more open to foreign interest and investments, new economic opportunities came to Ukraine, and with them, came the money and the promise of liberation from this sudden poverty:

> "…whatever people said at the time, but it was probably the time when many vacancies appeared, that people started believing in themselves, they believed that they could earn money, that they could live. Construction and businesses began… other things. The people started taking out loans to get cars, apartments, other things. There was confidence that you could have a normal life."

Hope, in this generation, seemed to express itself via materialism: the more hope people had, the more they bought and invested – it seems as though economic stability was the basis of a foreseeable future.

Ironically enough, 26 years later, the same idea of hope versus the ultimate low persists in the narratives of the generation that survived both the collapse of the Soviet system and the current economic and armed crisis in Ukraine:

> "I: But there's still hope?
> R: Of course! Or what? There's no other way. If we say that no, everything's bad and nothing good will ever happen and so on… then how will we function? I think that of course, everything will be fine."

Passivity. As previously mentioned, passivity does play a role in the narratives of the people at the time. Change, though anticipated, was not necessarily sought after. The people I interviewed and those they spoke about can be divided into three categories: those who expected change to happen "by itself," those who thought it would be brought about by faceless "others," and a small portion of people who actively sought this change out.

> "…something had to be done; something had to happen, nobody knew what, so, since it happened, naturally, there was hope that we would somehow get ourselves out of it…"

> "Things need to be changed… Changing the mentality is impossible, the people need to change."

It is quite interesting that this passivity features heavily in the Ukrainian mentality overall – there are several expressions in the Ukrainian language that feature this experience of not wanting to be involved actively but still having some sort of stake in what is happening. The best example of that would be "Моя хата скраю," which literally translates to "my house is on the edge [of the village/town]," the Ukrainian equivalent of "it's no skin off my back." The expression is actually the beginning of a longer phrase – although there is some debate as to how it ends. Some think it is "нічого не знаю," which translates to "I know nothing," indicating an even further detachment from the situation; others believe the phrase ends in a much more involved "першим ворога зустрічаю," which translates to "I am the first to face the enemy." Which version is the historically "correct" one is up for debate; however, it is for the reason that the first part of the expression is the one that is more frequently used in casual conversation.

Adaptation. Passivity transformed for some people later – when it became clear that the changes that had happened were irreversible and thus, the only two choices the people had were to either adapt or become stagnant. It was a bit of a continuation on the theme of the only way being up – and for some, it was this choice, to adapt or not, that led them to where they ended up 26 years later.

What made this adaptation vital was also the speed at which changes happened in the political, societal, and economic sense – a *quantum leap,* as one of the interviewees described it. It was the psychology of the individual that determined, for the most part, whether they would be able to continue evolving in this new climate or fall under the category of the nostalgic good-for-nothings that this generation is so resentful of:

> "It's a different world, a different reality, and I think that maybe it's something akin to a thousand-fold accelerated Industrial Revolution from some ancient [years]… the rebirth of the bourgeoisie. Because everything happened very fast, you had to orient

yourself very fast, and this is a generation of people who not only survived, it's a generation of people who managed to accustom themselves, to adapt to… the changes that happened first and foremost, on the inside. If you didn't change, you couldn't keep up."

For those who fell into the category that refused to remain standing while the entire country was moving on, it was akin to being taught how to ride a bike by getting pushed off a hillside – there were no classes on how to become an entrepreneur or even a player in this new sort of economy. However, instead of despair, this new climate brought about "challenge, excitement."

The adaptation wasn't random, either – a lot of businesses and people with particular profiles went into directions similar to what they had been doing before. They used their admittedly theoretical knowledge in a subject and steadily adapted it to be used in more commercial ways, using theories from the past and resources from the West – "a mix of the French and the Novgorod," according to one of the interviewees. This kind of approach was intuitive and at times based on nothing but sheer chance, which, to this day, makes the people belonging to that generation in awe of themselves:

> "…and it was amazing how the same people who had hands and brains and knew how to do it, how they managed to combine Western technologies that existed at the time and traditional approaches. They had to."

One of the traits attributable to the Ukrainian people that helped speed up this process and bring forth new technologies was a productive kind of desperation which, in turn, sparked the emergence of a new generation of businesspeople and visionaries:

> "…the word 'no' doesn't exist here. The people were so happy to take on any kind of job, any kind of progress, any kind of attention, that overtime, bonuses, trade unions, were completely out of the question. The people really worked hard, and I remember those periods when… we were given new projects, and people were excited by it because they had a constructive spark."

A separate kind of adaptation at the time was mass emigration – given a chance, many people decided to try their luck elsewhere, having grown weary of picking up the pieces of an

unsuccessful communist state. They went to Israel, the U.S., Germany, Italy, mostly in hopes of finding money and a better life there.

> "They didn't sit still, so the emigration process was quite a natural phenomenon. Some people think they can achieve more, so they go, they achieve something; some people stay, some return…"

This is perhaps resonant with another broadly Ukrainian mentality of grass being greener on the other side. Arguably the most prominent poet in Ukrainian history, Taras Shevchenko (1867), wrote "Аж бачу, там тілько добро, Де нас нема" – "I see there is only good where we are not," and this phrase by itself is seminal, denoting the common habit of looking outward, seeing what is going on outside of one's circle (be it on the micro -or macro-level), and being quite blind to the other side's flaws.

Category 2: Surviving the Collapse

The second category of themes has to do with the idea of survival and what it entailed in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. Due to the economic and political shifts that were constantly happening on a nearly day-to-day basis, the state of personal and national identity at the time was in flux and depended largely on external factors, such as foreign investment, as well as on the personal convictions and motivations of the Ukrainian people.

Core theme 4: Survival – "tushkoi-chuchelkom." An important part of the narrative of a generation going through political, societal and economic turbulence is survival. The idea of survival appears to be very central to the Ukrainian experience at the time – so central, in fact, that it has become near-mythological in its presentation and has been interwoven with cultural and mythical narratives of the Ukrainian people. One such example was given by one of the interviewees, who shared with me a fable which she saw as an excellent narrative to apply to the mentality of the Ukrainian people:

"… there's a great fable about two frogs […] When two frogs… they were very different in terms of character. One of them was active, headstrong, hard-working; and the second was passive, lazy… used to things falling in her lap, and she didn't like to make much of an effort.

And so, they went for a walk and smelled the sweet scent of mold and dampness coming from the cellar. They went over to see what was up, and while they were having fun in the cellar, they fell into a jug of milk. The walls of the jug, the neck was very tall. They tried to get out of the jug. The milk was slippery, and they couldn't do it.

And so, the second frog, the one that wasn't very headstrong, the lazy one, it thought, "Why am I fighting here? We're going to die anyway, in any case, it's obvious, we won't get out. Why make an effort? Why force myself? I'll drown anyway; I can't get out of here." It folded its legs and sank to the bottom.

The second frog said to itself, "my chances are very slim… and it's most likely that I will drown in this milk. But as long as I have strength, I will try to do something; I will fight for my life. I might drown, whatever, but I'll know that I tried everything I could." So, it stirred the milk, it swam, and in the morning, it realized that was it, that it had no more strength, that it couldn't feel its legs and it already began to sink…

Suddenly, it felt something firm under its legs. What was it? It turned out to be butter it had beat with its legs while it had struggled. So, it pushed itself off this butter and jumped out.

Why am I telling you this? Today, when I look at people from my generation, the ones that came from the Soviet Union, that Lost Generation which hadn't found its identity, the young generation of Ukrainians living here, I think that today we're like those frogs in the jug. And our only option is to beat that butter with our legs. Because we have no other choice. We will do it. That is what defines us Ukrainians, those living here today, working against those challenges that come up."

It should be noted that this kind of mythological narrative is quite characteristic of Ukrainian narratives. My interviewees' everyday speech, as well as my own, is strewn with references and idioms that are difficult to translate or relate to a person existing outside the larger speech community; however, these kinds of examples and myths make the cases presented here richer.

As mentioned in the previous themes above, a lot of the times, survival was what took precedence over any other facet of life at the time of the collapse and post-collapse turmoil. Part of the narrative relates to how philosophical ponderings and predictions of what might

happen – developed more in 'uncertainty' – were merely impossible due to fast-paced change and the need to keep up for fear of being left behind:

> "…in the end, they thought about how to survive in this situation, purely economically, physically, before thinking about any sort of sociopolitical nuances, so to speak."

Most of the time, survival for them meant overcoming economic difficulties like shortages, deficits, and inflation that skyrocketed after the USSR collapsed and Ukraine was forced to adopt its own currency which virtually had no value at the time. To the people who came from more-or-less prosperous cities, those centered around administration or industry, like Kyiv or Dnipro (Dnipropetrovsk at the time) this deficit, an heir to the overall shortages in the USSR that had been much more pronounced in smaller towns and villages, was an unpleasant wake-up call:

> "There was a total deficit. There was a complete deficit of everything. Everyone wore the same clothes… You couldn't live too well. Even with the money we had… empty shelves… Anyway, that's what happened in Dnipro. Insane queues for bread and everything else… butter, bread, sugar […] under Brezhnev, under the Soviet Union, even… we had everything. Probably, Kiev and Dnipro were the two cities that had everything before. Nobody knew what deficit was."

In the context of the collapse, survival meant going beyond the philosophical or the moral. Interviewees remember it as a time when taking advantage of one's situation and putting emphasis on one's self was much more important to them and others around them personally than any thought of the greater historical context or, the greater good. Stemming from that, there is a feeling that the issue of identity at the time also took a backseat to what people had to do day by day to make ends meet:

> "…in resilience and survival, we naturally lost our [in English] *self-identity.* We wanted everything, right now, and lots of it, and we were very busy."

Whether or not this damaged or created this generation's identity is anyone's guess. However, most of the interviewees feel that survival in their case both stemmed from and beget a facet of Ukrainian identity – a drive to overcome difficulties no matter what, to

survive "*tushkoi-chuchelkom*," as one of the interviewees put it; an untranslatable phrase which means by any means possible. A mundane yet stark example of this mentality was given by one of the interviewees who remembered the smell of onion cutlets frying on the stove. Meat was scarce at the time; and therefore, the people had to make do with what they had, frying up onions as if they were a delicacy.

Sometimes, survival meant leaving the country – for a lot of people, the interviewees say, those who had the opportunity to go, legally or otherwise, it was the only viable way out. Mass emigration began with Perestroika and continued to rise when the Eastern Bloc collapsed, and borders became more open. Though there was much red tape to go through to leave the country even after the system fell, survival kicked in and going through bureaucratic "hell" seemed surmountable compared to what they would have to do to live in Ukraine:

> "You still had to go through all the circles of hell, receive special passports, permission to leave the country, go through interviews at embassies and so forth. So, anything they could grab onto, including fake marriages, fake relatives and so forth…"

The people interviewed all saw survival as an inevitability as opposed to a struggle to which they had to apply maximum effort. In a way, it is quite the passive approach to this theme of survival – in the way that none of them saw it as a choice; rather, they saw it as something that had to be done. The alternative, they say, was to get lost in the turmoil of change:

> "This is why many people lost themselves in all this. As a rule, they were people who either became alcoholics – it was the easiest way out, cursing everyone and so forth, or the people who left, or… those who were on the verge of survival. I think, percentage-wise… from my generation, I think; first, they are, a) women, they are [in English] *better survivors*, and about thirty percent managed to claw their way out, out of those who stayed here […] I can't say that I know many people, many men, who lost themselves, but the women worked the most menial jobs and didn't sit on their hands… several jobs… Which is characteristic of our women, that you have a [in English] *responsibility*, and you have to carry it with gritted teeth."

It is an interesting perspective to take on survival – and the way Ukrainian women partook in the process. Despite gender equality still being a debatable concept in the country, there is a cultural approach to women in Ukraine that views them as powerful beings capable of an internal kind of strength that allows them to survive in any situation. There is a saying in the Russian language that is quite fitting to this sub-theme: that a woman "коня на скаку остановит и в горящую избу войдёт" – "she can stop a galloping horse in its tracks and walk into a house on fire." There is no telling why it is that Ukrainian women are both viewed and view themselves in this light – however, as the people interviewed say, it was an integral part to women's survival and success during the collapse and in its aftermath.

Another exciting addition to the narrative of survival is that it seemed to remain quite present within the discourse of the interviewees even today – and given the current political and military context in Ukraine, this theme of survival displays the kind of adaptability that was presented in the themes above.

> "It's very difficult for [foreigners] to understand, how it can be that the country it's at war, that a good 20 percent has been chopped off, but everything is developing and being supported and resisting and everything will be okay."

Yet again, this example seems to back up the inevitable nature of survival – that there is no other way but up and no other choice but to continue moving forward with life. Together with adaptability, survival appears to stand at the roots of the core idea of Ukrainian identity – both of these phenomena, as displayed further, seemed to have shaped the Lost Generation's idea of what it means to be Ukrainian.

Core theme 5: Business as savior. As mentioned previously, business and a new capitalist approach to economics was a saving grace of sorts – and people saw it as such. Among the people I interviewed, there are many accounts of entrepreneurship having been what had given a second chance and a new outlook to those who might have never been able

to imagine life under a capitalist model. People were hungry for money and for a challenge at the time – and it was business that delivered both in spades.

> "I can't imagine what would have happened if that tap hadn't opened in '94 and foreign companies hadn't come here. We would have remained part of the Russian Empire, and if… I don't know who got that idea at the time […] And so in '93, '94, '95; there was a bridge for international companies to come and bring a different culture, a different way of thinking, different kinds of relationships with people and so on within organizations."

Business was also what spurred people to start migrating to Western countries. First, they left with the intention of getting some money and coming back to rebuild. In reality, few people came back – the climate in Ukraine at the time was too tumultuous, too uncertain – and if one had that chance to build a home somewhere where they knew what tomorrow was going to be like, they were more likely to take that opportunity and stay. People were sick of the uncertainty – and jobs abroad guaranteed stability in a more tangible way. What also helped at the time was the commercialization of scientific minds – instead of academia, people went into business for the sake of money and personal pride:

> "I think that in general, the demographics of the other countries, where people went, it was predisposed to embracing this labor force. Of course, they even called specialists and scientists and engineers… niche specialist… they were invited to other countries."

In a way, one could see this as unpatriotic. The country was and still does bleed brilliant minds into the outside world where life is better – but at the time, this was survival.

Quite interestingly, the Lost Generation is quite convinced to this day that business could guarantee stability in more ways than just the economic. Having been disillusioned with "professional" party nomenclature with their equal façade and hidden privilege, they look towards a new model of government – one that does not include politicians but rather, businesspeople – those who would have their best interests in mind:

> "Maybe we need to turn from the professional politicians we have towards something completely different. Like Singapore, where the country and city are not run by a single

politician, there are only businessmen. The country is governed by business. That's it! Business and economics. And everything is done practically, well, maybe a little dryly, perhaps quite expensively, but it's also an experience. So, politics itself has to be replaced somehow… *Politikanstvo* [in Russian, a derogatory way of referring to professional politics] has to be replaced with a culture of politics."

Whether this kind of belief is utopian or dystopian or not is up for debate. However, it is quite clear that in this case, business and capitalism are equated with individual choice and meritocracy – which, at the time of the collapse, was a breath of fresh air for people who were sick and tired of having to fall in line and conform. Business to this day remains an expression of individuality and creativity, to some degree, for Ukrainians – and, perhaps, it could also become and expression of political will.

Core theme 6: Oracle foreigners. Business was brought from the outside – quite naturally, of course, since private enterprise had no reason to exist under socialism. Therefore, all the innovations that Ukrainians came to face and later adapt to were imported by someone – foreigners.

"…when Western companies came, they brought innovations, technologies, taking into account that all that was kept from us before… so we really looked towards them and prayed. If a foreigner came, it… was exotic, and they were seen as oracles."

One needs to understand that first and foremost, foreigners had always been exoticized in the Soviet Union – a country hidden behind an Iron Curtain, where practically all migration and travel was strictly domestic. People and things from abroad were rarities, and most people, especially those who lived in rural areas, would never even have had a chance to see a pair of Levi's jeans or chew a piece of bubble gum. Those who were lucky enough to go abroad somehow (usually for various merits), were subject to much curiosity and questioning:

"I remember, he came back, and he was greeted like Yuri Gagarin. 'Dude, you were in New York, what's up there? What are the Americans like?' Things like that. An actual person went to America and came back…"

Naturally, when foreigners came to see what Ukraine was about after the collapse, they were seen as prophets, as oracles, and, perhaps, guides. Ukrainians at the time, drowning in uncertainty and unsustainable economic conditions, gave this guidance great importance.

Category 3: Ukrainian Identity and Division

The final category has to do with the concept of Ukrainian identity and what it means to the participants individually, having come from a generation that had been born into one nationality and ended up in another. Additionally, this category also encompasses an important part of what it means to be Ukrainian – facing the divisions that historically and politically had become central to the discussion on what it means to be Ukrainian.

Core theme 7: East/West divide. As mentioned previously in the literature review, there is a historical premise to the following theme. Due to circumstance and historical developments throughout the territory of what is now contemporary Ukraine (the recent events of 2014 included), there has not only been an ideological but also a historical and economic division between the Ukrainian-speaking West and the Russian-speaking East; with the center of the country delicately balancing between the two. Whether it is the language itself that divides the country, or it just so happens that the linguistic differences only serve to contribute to the divide is unknown. However, these divisions have fundamentally shaped not only the history of their respective regions but also what the

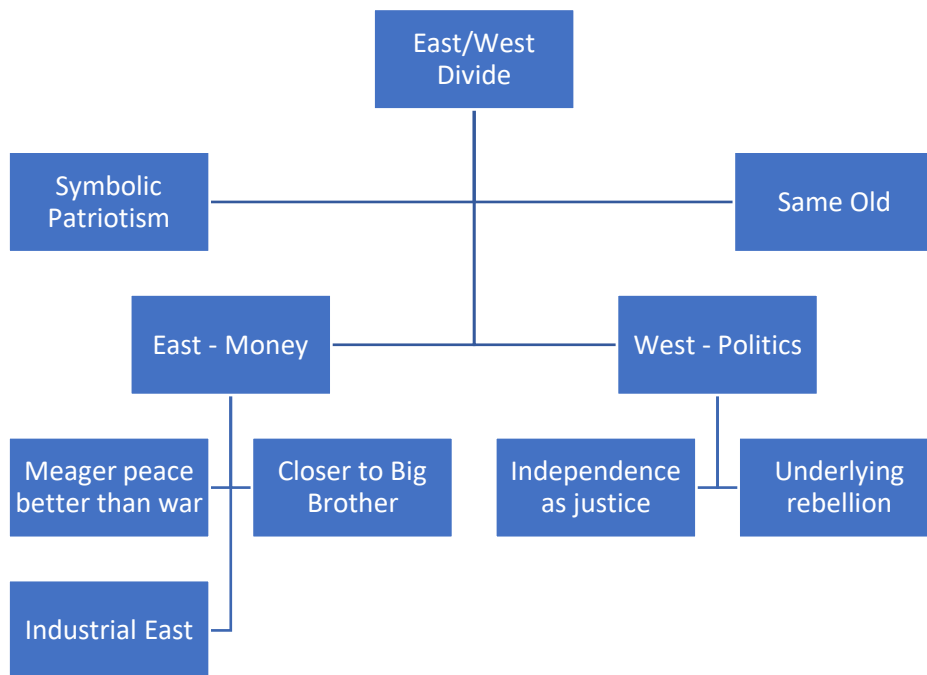inhabitants of these regions recognize as being Ukrainian.

Figure 4 – East/West Divide Theme and Subthemes

It is also important to recognize, going forward with this analysis, that these divisions often run so deep as to shape the speech of the interviewees about their geographical counterparts – often, quite negatively.

Before we delve into the analysis, it should be noted that the geographical definitions of both Western and Eastern Ukraine are arbitrary at best. For example, the term Western Ukraine may be used to include Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil Oblasts; however, some use the term to also include Volyn, Rivne, Khmelnytsky, Chernivtsi and Zakarpattya Oblasts. Eastern Ukraine, a little more stable in its definition, is used to denote Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

For the sake of this analysis, these terms will be simplified to denote the majority spoken language in the region – Ukrainian for Western Ukraine and most of the center, and Russian for Eastern Ukraine.

Western Ukraine/Ukrainian speakers: repressed, rebellious, nationalist. The majority of Western Ukrainian territories used to constitute part of various western nations –the Kingdom of Poland, the Kingdom of Hungary, the Kingdom of Moldova, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, etc. Therefore, the course of this territory's development had always, since the initial fall of the Kyivan Rus been shaped, in some form, by a more "European" and "western" course. This is important to keep in mind when talking about why Western Ukraine looks more towards the West when economic and social development are brought up.

"So, when communist leaders came, naturally, they started some kind of nationalization which influenced the economic state of the region, and naturally, they weren't welcome."

Despite having been conquered and divided by many a land; and having been forced out of speaking Ukrainian by the Polish, Lithuanians and, eventually, Soviet Russians, Ukrainians in the West had somehow managed to preserve their national integrity and language – as well as a long historical memory for what turned out to be horrific political repressions against ethnic Ukrainians in the region.

"…the historical context in Western Ukraine was that a lot of people suffered from the actions of the Soviet government, so there were grievances, there was bad blood, with the party functionaries, which… In '41, ten thousand people were executed by firing squad in Lviv; it happened, it was politically motivated."

As opposed to the people in the East, Western Ukrainians seem to carry antagonism against Soviet Russia in their blood – this idea of being historically wronged; and the idea of Communist leaders as invaders rather than allies is quite prominent in the speech of one of the people I interviewed who hails from one of the most starkly nationalist regions in modern Ukraine, Lviv Oblast. What is interesting that though political repressions may have happened decades ago, the people in Western Ukraine seem to still have a bad taste in their mouths about the secrecy and censorship surrounding these events. According to my

interviewees, it appears as though these are seen as cutting Western Ukrainians off from their history for the sake of assimilation in a way.

> "Western Ukrainians didn't want to be coerced into anything by the communists. Western Ukraine was more developed, and it had depended economically on the Austro-Hungarian Empire, later the Polish influence, and so on. It was clear that Western Europe was much more economically developed, that democratic institutions were much stronger than in Tsarist Russia."

What should also be noted is that communism and socialism were concepts adverse to the way of life in Western Ukraine, were private enterprises and agriculture bloomed under the previous regimes – therefore, when the time came to hand over private property to the government for redistribution, the people in Western Ukraine, both rich and poor, were less likely to meekly it.

> "But the Soviets were aggressive since they had an equipped army and the repressive system of the NKVD on their side. It was evident that there was a joint struggle of the OUN-UPA against these regimes…"

When Glasnost and, eventually, the fall of the Soviet Union came about, the truth about many of these politically-motivated struggles came out.

> "Back then, facts that people were too afraid to speak about in the Union appeared… about mass repressions in Western Ukraine, especially starting with '38, and about the fight of the OUN-UPA… so these things were spoken about openly now, and it seems to me that some KGB archives were partially opened to the public… which were essentially a shock to many people. Back then, every page that was made accessible to many people was… a cultural and social shock."

This cultural and social shock seems to have become engrained in the political and social discourse in Western Ukraine. An example of that is the city of Lviv, which boasts a colorful international demographic and has become a sort of attraction for those who want to have a taste of Ukrainian nationalism. There is a restaurant, called Kryyivka, which is made to be a copy of an OUN-UPA hideout, where dishes carry unambiguously un-Russian names and the password is "Slava Ukrayini!" (*Glory to Ukraine!,* a nationalist greeting which has since the events of 2014 become a standard chant at public events).

Underlying rebellion. Despite the measures the Soviet government had attempted to quash Ukrainian nationalism in the West, as shown above, there always seemed to be an underlying rebelliousness to the people there. My interviewee spoke about "student brotherhoods" gathering in secret to discuss the idea of independent Ukraine even before the collapse. They would carry the red-and-black (nationalist) and blue-and-yellow (Ukrainian national) flags and visit historical spots dedicated to the struggles between Ukrainian nationalists and the Bolsheviks despite the ideological police having been hot on their heels.

> "It was interesting, when during my third year we went to a corps in Lviv Oblast, to the village of Yavory. Those were the villages where there was arduous fighting between *banderivtsi* [Stepan Bandera is an icon of Ukrainian nationalism and a historical nationalist leader] and the NKVD during the war. The locals weren't that simple there, and when one of them saw a yellow-and-blue flag we had, they came to us in the evening and started to tell us, ad nauseam, about their local history. It was on the verge of foolishness – we knew that if someone had been waiting for us there, we would have been in trouble with the KGB."

In Western Ukraine, these rebellious acts served as a precursor for Ukrainian independence. The anticipation of change here was different here – instead of circumstantial, it was more ideological in nature. It was seen as something that was supposed to happen eventually because there was no way for Ukraine to exist as anything other but an independent state.

> "So, a year before the declaration of independence, these kinds of things were already happening. Probably some pro-Ukrainian nationalist organizations promoted such things in youth circles and developed this thought of separating from the Union, that it was a matter of time, and after that, we had to form a new Ukrainian state. With a flag and a coat of arms, and all that."

Western Ukraine's historical memory also has a hand in this rebelliousness – my interviewee shared with me a theory as to why it was that as far as he was concerned, Ukrainians were, in a way, doomed to rebel and break out of this cycle of consecutive conquest:

"You know, whenever I look at what's happening in Ukraine, it's a hundred percent the remains of our genetic code. The Ukrainian tribes were probably very freedom-loving and didn't succumb to, say, maneuvers which led to them being enslaved by other nations… Even though it happened, but it occurred as a result of a whole series of historical lies and betrayal. If we look at Cossack settlements… and free thinkers, let's say… and probably the part of the Kyivan Rus where Slavic life began. We are at the center of where the Rus came from. That's where we should look for historical roots […] but the spirit of the Cossacks, the spirit of freedom, that's probably what defines our difference from other nations."

Whether or not these views are extreme or not, as this same interviewee expressed later, is up for debate even now. Ukrainian nationalism, like any nationalism, I believe, has a bit of a bad reputation among those who have not partaken in it as much as Western Ukrainians. The idea of genetic memory can be contested. However, one could argue that there might be an *epi*genetic memory at play here – during the Holodomor, for example, people starved similarly to what happened during the Dutch Hunger Winter, a phenomenon that had been proven to have left genetic markers on people's DNA, causing higher levels of metabolic and mental disorders (Tobi et al., 2018). Whether these kinds of historical scars were left on Ukrainians' DNA in the West may or may not be true – but psychological scars are just as deep, and they have permeated generations upon generations.

Independence as justice. Given everything mentioned above, it is no surprise that when independence came, or even when its coming became more tangible, the atmosphere in Western Ukrainian cities changed.

"…it was very bright, the voting or the referendum for independence… in Dorogobych, it was a very festive occasion. A big mass of people went, consciously, to vote for independence; since, as I've said before, the historical context in Western Ukraine was that a lot of people suffered from the actions of the Soviet government, so there were grievances, there was bad blood…"

In this sense, the declaration of independence in Western Ukraine was perceived as a just ending to a bloody history – a history in which, according to the people whose families suffered from mass repressions and assimilation, the Soviet government had been at fault the entire time. Independence was brought about by anger and a thirst for revenge – but more so,

it was a thirst for something that appeared to have been looming on the horizon for many years, but was never entirely given to the people of Western Ukraine.

Interestingly enough, this thirst and this historical memory, as well as bitter historical righteousness, are still quite present in the discourse of people in Western Ukraine – and since the events of 2014, this discourse has begun to spread to the rest of the country, closer to the central regions. What is interesting is that although this study focuses on the Lost Generation, these notions are quite transgenerational – possibly precisely due to the long historical memory people have in more nationalism-prone regions.

Eastern Ukraine/Russian speakers: industrial, pacifist, assimilated. Things were entirely different in Eastern Ukraine. It should be noted before we delve into the themes themselves, that both of my interviewees from Eastern Ukraine were a few years younger than the rest – therefore, their age must be taken into account when talking about the psychology of pre- and post-independent years among Eastern Ukrainians.

Industrial East. Eastern Ukraine, historically and to this day, is much more industrialized than the West. There is a high concentration of industrial productions in the area, including coal, chemical, petroleum, metallurgy and mechanical engineering productions. Indeed, both of my Eastern interviewees felt a connection to that industrial side of their birthplace – mostly because of the economies of the cities they lived in, Mariupol and Dnipro, are both heavily dependent on the industrial facilities there.

> "R: … Dnipro was a closed city. There were no foreigners. The Southern Machine-Building Plant was here. We lived in a closed town.
> I: I didn't know that.
> R: Of course. Yuzhmash.
> I: Ah, yes.
> R: Yes, yes, we had Yuzhmash, that's why there were no foreigners. We had our own thing.
> I: A sort of… enclave.

R: An enclave, yes. It was a city that functioned… there were many production facilities, Yuzhmash, many factories and other things…
I: So everything was self-sustained?
R: Yes, everything functioned, and when things started falling apart, it was a shock.
I: Because of the economic impact?
R: Yes, because of economics. People didn't have jobs; they were out in the street…"

Because of people's lives having been so intricately interwoven with the industrial side of things in Eastern Ukraine, the collapse of the Soviet system was a huge blow for the very reasons listed above, in the theme of "darkness." Job prospects went from secure to shaky – one of my interviewees remembers that her plans for employment had been ruined and she was forced to take extra courses and pick up random jobs to make ends meet. Another recalls her parents' struggle, as her father worked at a factory in their hometown, and suddenly, the before unbelievable idea of getting laid off became much more threatening.

However, both of them claim that it was their age that actually protected them from too much anxiety at the time. They were young enough to change the course of their lives, and as they didn't have their own income, the economic pressure lay much more on the shoulders of their parents; and with it, a deeper understanding of politics.

Closer to Big Brother. When independence was declared in Ukraine, the approval ratings for independence in Eastern and Southern Ukraine were quite high – however, these numbers were lower than those in the West (Wilson, 1997). The most common language at the time was, and remains, Russian – in fact, when independence was declared, Donetsk didn't have a single Ukrainian-language school (Steele, 1988). Keeping that in mind, it is no surprise that Eastern Ukrainians of any generation, to varying degrees, felt a lot more closeness to Russia than Western Ukrainians – in fact, one could argue that they felt closer to the Russian mentality than the Western Ukrainian (more nationalist) mentality overall. Both of my interviewees claim they feel uncomfortable when faced with overt nationalism – and that they don't necessarily subscribe to this kind of "aggressive patriotism."

"Well, first of all, I grew up in the eastern region of Ukraine and… No, I can't say that with the collapse of the Soviet Union we started looking towards Europe… I want to note that it's my personal conviction that Western Ukraine had always historically been more European than Eastern Ukraine. And I think that with the collapse of the USSR, the people there got the opportunity to [in Ukrainian] *go to work there* and that was their most significant achievement. That's what they started doing and what they still do. But in general, historically speaking, that territory was under Austria-Hungary, other countries… It had always been more European. For us, I didn't sense any kind of European course at the time."

What made things harder during the collapse of the Soviet Union for Western Ukrainians was the fact that many Eastern Ukrainians had family in Russia. One of my interviewees laments the loss of even the opportunity to visit her family abroad since borders became harder to cross between Ukraine and Russia recently.

"Well, for me it's emotionally hard because I can't visit as easily as I could have before, to go to Vladimirskaya Oblast, yeah, where I grew up, where I spent every summer since I was one. I don't talk to anyone there… well, even before these events [the war of 2014], I already had no ties there. The last time I was there, was 1990, in the village. But it… it does bother me, and I would like to go."

What is also interesting is that Easter Ukraine appeared to have been much more indoctrinated in the unity of nations discourse that failed in Western Ukraine – and for them, it appeared to be a source of comfort.

"…when I was a kid in the Soviet Union, we were told about the fifteen brotherly nations… it appeared to me as something powerful, and I liked the fact that I had brothers who were Kazakhs, Moldovans, and that we were all different but also somehow united. But as I said, after the collapse, I wasn't sorry about it. For some reason, I thought that despite the fact that we were an independent state now, we'd still be on good terms."

A unifying factor back then and to this day is the Russian language. There is quite a bit of argument surrounding the subject of language in Ukraine currently – whereby the government is pushing for more Ukrainian content in media and schooling; and Eastern Ukrainians are not necessarily on board with that. To them, the issue of language touches a nerve because of this nationalist conversation – in the way that choosing to speak Russian in everyday situations would make them less Ukrainian:

"For example, the fact that my mother tongue is the Russian language. But I am no less Ukrainian for it. I grew up in a Russian speaking region, and that's not something that can be changed, that fact. You can go back and change things. But I am no less Ukrainian just because I speak a different language, you see?"

Of course, when reading this, one needs to keep in mind that I spoke to two people who chose to remain living in independent Ukraine and were on the Ukrainian side of the argument in 2014. Therefore, their perception of nationality and nationalism may be entirely different from that of the people who had made their choice in favor of separatism.

Meager peace better than war. The idea of nationalism as unfavorable and a more passive approach to Ukrainian politics and politics, in general, is a common theme in both of my interviewees' texts. Given the prominence of their economic connection to their geographic roots in Eastern Ukraine, even in the nineties, it is no surprise that this way of thinking holds today:

"I don't know. I am not a big nationalist. I am probably more for some sort of… Some sort of meager peace, which is better than a good war. Plus, again, if we're talking about life, it's very connected to the economy, anyhow. Destroying things is easy. How do we rebuild them afterward?"

Interestingly enough, despite the war going on in Eastern Ukraine as of the moment of writing this thesis, one of my interviewees remembers her city as having solved their issues in the early 90's by way of business, and not bloodshed. Criminal activity was pretty widespread in Ukraine's larger towns at the time, with mobsters trying to take control of private enterprises; but she remembers that time as entirely peaceful:

"There are even statistics in Dnipro that show that there was no bloodshed here, which happened in Donetsk, in Kiev, in other places. There was no bloodshed here, everything here was decided through negotiations."

This is perhaps one of Easter Ukrainians' biggest dilemmas at the moment – it is the question whether they must take up arms and defend their territory for the sake of Ukraine's sovereignty; or whether they would rather live for their interests and preserve their

livelihoods any way they could. In a way, the answer to this question was decided for them many years ago, when the East of Ukraine became an industrialized, business-centric territory; when Russian became its first language, and when nationalism took a backseat to putting bread on the table:

> "But to say that I'm going to pick up a gun and fight in the war… no. I wouldn't go. I wouldn't go for one simple reason: I am more of a pacifist, and I don't see sense in… someone else's war. That's that. To me, this war is someone else's, what's happening now. It's… someone is fighting for their business interests, but… our boys are dying. In the name of what? I don't know. To say, that it's in the name of independence… I don't know […] I think history will show what they fought for."

In Eastern Ukraine, there is a more tangible element to patriotism – one in where individuals and their families can live in relative prosperity and happiness. Going to war for an ideal, as nationalist Western Ukraine would, is not in the cards for my interviewees here. What is more – and perhaps this is a bit of a stereotype, but I think it is important to mention that both my Eastern interviewees are women, and both are mothers. To them, the war would hit very close to home – and they would not want to let it near their porch.

Symbolic Patriotism. It is also important to talk about the different approaches the two generally divided territories take to the same issues. One of the themes that came up is the idea of symbolic patriotism.

In Western Ukraine, one cannot possibly make the mistake of thinking they ended up in another Eastern European country. Not only are all signs in Ukrainian, and not only do people, young and old, speak Ukrainian as their first language; even the overall spirit of economics and businesses is more geared towards a "very Ukrainian" audience. There patriotic chants and monuments in the streets, festivals celebrating the Ukrainian culture, people wearing *vyshyvankas* casually, and so on.

In Eastern Ukraine, the situation is quite different:

"So those national issues, we're being coerced that we have to be up to some sort of standards, for example [in Ukrainian] speak the Ukrainian language, celebrate Ukrainian holidays or wear the *vyshyvanka.* Then you're Ukrainian. I don't abide by these kinds of policies. I think that you can love your country with your whole heart but not have to idolize its symbols. Like wearing the *vyshyvanka* or speaking Ukrainian. I believe that in a free and tolerant country… there shouldn't be any coercion."

In contrast to Western Ukraine, and to the patriotic and nationalist moods described above, in Eastern Ukraine, patriotism takes on a much subtler, more subdued form. To them, patriotism has much less to do with symbols in the tangible sense, and more with the spirit of belonging to a nation – an unusual position to take when one doesn't feel necessarily welcome in their own country due to their language of choice.

It is interesting that there is a fear of nationalism and fear of nationalist symbols in Eastern Ukraine. Perhaps, in a way, it is fear that historically echoes back to what this kind of symbolic patriotism can do when manipulated by the wrong people. Eastern Ukrainians have been both under Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany enough to fear overt declarations of their allegiances. Historically, Western Ukraine had been in the same position – but to them, nationalism became a saving grace.

The Eastern and Western points of view on this theme are radically opposing – and whether one is better than the other is an ongoing debate in Ukrainian politics. What is important to remember is that to these two groups, being Ukrainian means different things – and neither one is wrong or right.

Same old. There is another theme that seems to have directly opposing points of view depending on where the beholder is geographically and linguistically – the idea of things staying the same after the collapse of the USSR.

Among Western Ukrainians, there was a hopefulness – that European values would become more prevalent in the mentality of Ukrainians, that businesses would take a more

Western approach – basically that the "oracle foreigners" would arrive and help Ukraine get

off its knees. At the same time, there was a kind of cynicism when it came to discussing

Ukrainian politics in particular – a cynicism that remains echoed in discourse today:

> "And a new party nomenclature began coming together, but under new banners, under another party… well, flags and ideologies."

To my interviewees from Western Ukraine, the "same old, same old" of Ukrainian

politics, never mind the general ideology, was a drag – it was something undesirable,

something to be done away with. My interviewee from Kyiv echoed that sentiment as well

when she said she had more hopes for businesspeople to run the country than politicians

purely because she felt nothing changed in politics.

On the Eastern side of the argument, however, there was a bit of nostalgia – not for

politics necessarily, but for the feeling of unity and organization that came with being part of

a tremendous Soviet nation.

> "I thought that since we had been united before, that there was this myth of a Slavic brotherhood and all that. That we would still be on good terms with Byelorussians, Moldovans, Georgians, Kazakhs. And, of course, Russians. I thought that there was no other way."

There was also some fear related to the loss of connections – economic and familial. In

that sense, the idea of sticking to what they already knew was comforting, it was something

that had already been proven by history and didn't necessarily need to change – of course,

that coming from a more industrial-based East where these connections played a vital social

and economic role.

> "What this independence would give us… it was absolutely unclear. Why? Because it seemed that each country would just have its president, but all those connections, contacts… That circle, it would remain, for example, that there would be different centers responsible for various things, different financial centers, nothing more. That everything would be the same as before, that every country would have its president. That's it."

This is another explanation as to why independence was met with more hostility and mistrust in the East – the uncertainty of what would happen to those economic and social connections far outweighed the nationalist hurrah that was more present in the West. Financial stability quite apparently had more of a weight in the consciousness of the people in Eastern Ukraine – whereas, in the West, the struggle for independence was far more ideological.

Core theme 8: Identity.

The final theme has to do with the establishment of core Ukrainian identity. Given the divisions mentioned above, it is quite hard to define what a "uniform" Ukrainian would be like. According to a study Onuch & Hale, not only is Ukraine a divided society, but that the divide is blurry and breaks down into "individual language preference, language embeddedness, ethnolinguistic identification, and nationality" (2018). This is consistent with the themes identified above – and this is also what makes the definition of Ukrainian identity very fluid and dependent not so much on nationality/ethnicity per se; but rather, the individual's personal experience.

However, there are several themes that transverse this blurriness – and these were quite consistent across the interviewees within the Lost Generation. For the sake of simplicity, I chose to divide these aspects into "the Good" and "the Negative," not by any moral standard, but rather by the emotions associated with this or another facet of Identity.
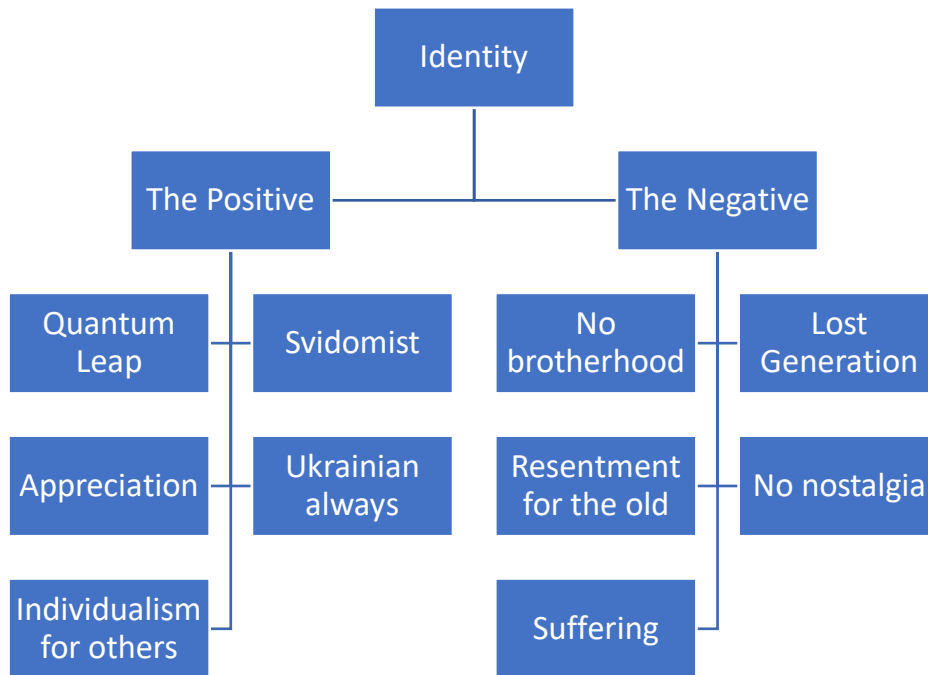
Figure 5 – Identity Theme and Subthemes

The positive. This subcategory captures the experience of Ukrainians that are part of the Lost Generations that were generally characterized as positive or had positive outcomes in the short or longer-term.

Quantum leap. The quantum leap, a term used by one of my interviewees, can be defined as the general ability of the Lost Generation and, from their point of view, the vast majority of Ukrainian people, to rapidly adapt and grow per an ever-changing environment.

> "The [in English] *quantum leaps* that happened. Where these leaps occurred was, first and foremost, of course, in the consciousness, the people didn't go through all the circles of hell but skipped from one step towards the highest. And this is quite a unique phenomenon, but I think we got lucky in that regard."

When talking about the *quantum leap,* most of the participants of this study focused on the quick adaptive ability of the Ukrainian people to new formats of business and economics – that the leap from socialism to capitalism happened very fast, and people with certain educational backgrounds had to use their knowledge and intuition to channel their education into new avenues.

Ukrainians, according to the interviewees, are no strangers to uncharted territories – the overall stability of the Soviet Union had been an illusion for outsiders, they claim; in reality, making leaps of faith, ability, and intellect, was an everyday occurrence across generations. However, because of the economic situation and the ideological shift that happened with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this phenomenon became all the more pronounced and, perhaps, necessary:

> "It's a different world, a different reality, and I think that maybe it's something akin to a thousand-fold accelerated Industrial Revolution from some ancient [years]… the rebirth of the bourgeoisie. Because everything happened very fast, you had to orient yourself very fast, and this is a generation of people who not only survived, it's a generation of people who managed to accustom themselves, to adapt to… the changes that happened first and foremost, on the inside."

It is interesting that despite the outward change being more dependent on economic and commercial capabilities, for my interviewees, that also constituted a "change on the inside," as if their financial circumstance was capable of pushing for inward, psychological change at a rapid pace. What is also interesting is the fact that this *quantum leap* mentality continues – and it almost feels like the Lost Generation sees it as a torch to pass down to their successors. Not only that, it seems to be central that the *quantum leap* is also a requirement for the development of a stable Ukrainian identity – whatever their conception of it is.

> "I: Do you think this [in English] *identity,* it will be cultivated from what we already have in the sense of Ukrainian identity, or we'll have to look toward other countries? R: I think, [in English] *both*. Because we'll need another [in English] *quantum leap*."

Not only that, the *quantum leap* appears to be a facet unique to Ukrainian people, and only available as an internal resource rather than an external, foreign-mandated skill that can be learned from the aforementioned "oracles" that come from abroad. It appears to be an inherent, innate ability – rather than something learned.

Individualism for others. Much like the previous one, this facet of the Ukrainian identity appears inherent despite it having been developed more after the fall of the USSR –

not that it was absent before; instead, that it was pushed to the forefront of Ukrainian consciousness.

The rise of capitalism brought about a more individualistic approach to life in the economic sense – people could finally earn money they could spend on themselves rather than have to rely on a collectivist state's handouts. The rise of oligarchy in the nineties is testament to the fact that the rise of the nouveau riche (or the "New Russians" [Noviye Russkiye], as they are colloquially named in former Soviet countries) occurred through both legal and illegal means and caused a significant imbalance in wealth that continues to grow to this day.

However, my interviewees also saw a positive aspect to the rise of business – that one could now work not only for their own good but also for the good of others. One of my interviewees compared being Ukrainian to being a "team player," another mentioned that the shadow economy, though not entirely legal, helped improve people's lives by surpassing the constraints the fledgling country had set for them. She says that for too long, the people had been forced into collective consciousness without this kind of altruism happening naturally; now, this interconnectedness began to show on people's own initiatives:

"…resources, people, knowledge, technologies and so forth, it didn't matter, but… it was a movement."

When talking about the subject of leaving the country to look for work abroad, my interviewees mentioned either a lack of need to emigrate because of the already existing base in Ukraine. Both economically and emotionally, they felt secure enough and appreciated enough to apply themselves to work in their country; others expressed their appreciation for the people who left to study or work abroad and came back. Both of these sentiments indicate a home-bound recognition for those who try their hand at working inside the country.

"Well, for me today, being Ukrainian is living in this country and working for its benefit. After all, I think that's someone who makes an effort to do something, to create something, to earn money, to incorporate new ideas… someone who makes this

country better. I think that to be Ukrainian today is to make a choice in favor of this country."

Despite their roots being collectivist, the people of Ukraine and the Lost Generation, in particular, have an appreciation for individualism – however, they see it as an opportunity to build a better country for themselves and others. Whether it is an echo of the collective consciousness or a genuine wish for a better world and the ability to work for it, is up in the air. However, it can be said that the people I interviewed have an awareness and faith in their fellow countrymen.

Appreciation in Ukraine. Another sub-theme connected to the one mentioned above is that of appreciation. As mentioned before, the majority of the people I interviewed decided to stay in Ukraine because of the feeling of recognition – the sentiment being that they saw themselves as a valuable asset to the country and an extension of the people who had invested their time, knowledge, and money into them:

> "It's an issue of personal comfort. Not because I'm smarter than everyone else, I just feel that here, a lot has been invested in me and there are feedback and elements of luck or misfortune, it's another question but… that [in English] *appreciation*, that's certain."

The perception of appreciation manifested itself in various ways; for some, it was a reactionary feeling. When borders opened and Ukrainians were finally able to travel outside the country and begin to work in places like Europe and the U.S., they had to reconcile their former ideas of the West as quite utopian with the reality of it being quite the opposite – and not entirely for everyone. Additionally, appreciation was directly connected with the idea of identity and uniqueness – I believe in some regard, that has to do with the fact that all my interviewees completed higher education and were middle-class – therefore, they had more opportunities and more to offer to a potential employer and within the broader context of Ukrainian business, economy, and society:

"…it's my country, my roots, and it seemed to me that I would be more [in English] *appreciated* here, and… I'd retain my uniqueness, my [in English] *identity*. Otherwise, it would be murky and unclear. And when I started going places, traveling, I saw how different they were, how closed off, how [in English] *unfriendly*, how… the label of a young girl which would do anything to leave this country, this was how we were seen, at least, in many civilized European countries. I won't point any fingers."

The stigma against Eastern Europeans continues to this day – and perhaps, it is also the reason many people choose to return to Ukraine after studying abroad. There is still a narrative of oracle foreigners among the laypeople; however, there is also a disillusionment in which a lot of the elder and younger generations have made their peace with the fact that the West, to them, was not much better – it was merely different.

In the end, the Lost Generation's attachment to Ukraine, if they had chosen to stay in the country, having discussed everything in the two themes above, can be summarized with the following quote:

"It's where you belong. It's where you are most appreciated."

Svidomist. The concept of *svidomist* (directly translated as consciousness or awareness from Ukrainian) is currently a bit of a buzzword among Ukrainians in the wake of a more nationalist approach to society and politics starting with the events of 2013-2014. Though the direct translation of the word is quite clear, there is also a second, deeper meaning to the word, which is harder to grasp and is connected to the themes of individualism for others and appreciation mentioned above.

This meaning encompasses an overall feeling of national consciousness, what Paul Gilbert, author of "The Philosophy of Nationalism," would call a more voluntarist, axiological, and destinarian functions of nationhood – a commonly-willed, bound group of people who share the same values and have a common history and mission (Gilbert, 1998). As one of my interviewees put it,

"I think it's not just a matter of culture; it's philosophical thinking and the worldview."

This kind of national consciousness, although I do believe it is more appropriate to call it by its Ukrainian name, *svidomist*, is an unspoken, ever-shifting concept that results from a fluctuating and evolving social conversation on nationhood, nationality, and the "where do we go from here?" question Ukrainians were faced both in the fall of the USSR and now, given the current events. The recent developments in the South and East of Ukraine are also the reason I want to approach this theme with caution – given the rise of reactionary nationalism in Ukraine; it was a given this theme would be quite saturated in its intensity.

First, there is the Ukrainian awareness of its uniqueness – that is to say, that the rift between the previously more acceptably interchangeable concepts of Ukrainian and Russian, shifted radically. The collapse of the USSR made the two countries separate politically – and the war of 2014 widened the rift significantly, ushering in a new time of hypersensitivity to being mistaken for Russians among Ukrainians. The negative side of this will be expanded on more in the themes below, under "The Negative."

> "When we were in Sarajevo, when all the unrest happened, there was fighting… Ukrainians showed their best qualities and… Ukrainian soldiers were seen as the good guys because […] the Russian Federation was still seen as an heir to the Soviet Union."

This passage demonstrates that not only there is a significant distinction between Russian and Ukrainian, but also that there is a clear designation of "us" versus "them," in which "they," being Russian, are vilified in the narrative of not only the speaker but also within what he had experienced among the people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Another addition to the idea of national consciousness is this creative and adaptive impulse discussed previously. When it became clear that after the collapse, the government was scrambling to at least stay organized, people had to take their fate into their own hands and to represent Ukraine on a national and international level.

"At a particular moment, we really wanted to do something, to… to help people and become different. And to see… communication styles, the ability to establish relationships, etcetera… those are things that can make any environment successful. And after three-four years of work, we wanted to show to the world that something was [in Russian] *happening* here. That we were able to and knew how to do things. That's where we got the desire to develop our own talents and hear Ukrainian names abroad. So that everyone would understand that there are excellent human resources in Ukraine, people who can represent the country with dignity."

Svidomist encompasses agency, as well as the ability and need to make a change within the country and equally as importantly, to represent it in a positive light to the world. Additionally, my interviewee says, there is also a willingness to invest one's efforts for the sake of dignity and independence – and for the sake of others, "in terms of always wanting to help, to support, and so on." Peculiarly enough, this aspect of *svidomist* is also quite reactionary to the Soviet days:

"I've seen very clearly how Russians do it, it's always [in English] *with purpose.* There's enough of that among Ukrainians to… all those leftovers of the Soviet model, but there's no… [in English] *hidden agenda.* The Russians always had this [in English] *hidden agenda,* and they wouldn't lift a finger if it didn't benefit them. So, Ukrainians are… we know how to survive, we know how to stand up for ourselves. We're not indifferent."

As with the first quote, there is a lot of reactionary language here, as well as a nationalist kind of "us/them" mentality, which is quite strong in its mood and manifestation. However, despite that, there is also a discussion of empathy and altruism and Ukrainians' innate capacity for both. The same person also described this capacity as a product of the historical injustices that had been done to Ukrainians in the past:

"So, a Ukrainian person, for me, is a person who knows how to empathize, first and foremost. It's someone who knows how to build relationships. It's someone who… knows how to find the way out of any situation. Unfortunately, it happens unwittingly quite a lot. Because it comes from our genes, our brains, our genes… this instinctive ability to find the way out of any situation."

All of these quotes have admittedly made me quite ambivalent about the conclusions I need to draw from them. On the one hand, there is a genuine belief in Ukraine being "the good guy" and "the underdog," capable of more because of a what doesn't kill you makes you

stronger mentality; which would make sense based on the wealth of literature that deals with ethnic identity development and resilience building (Romero et al., 2014). However, one must also proceed with caution when evaluating such statements – as genuine belief in one's moral high ground, and nationalistic rancor might be interchangeable and cyclical in the creation of these feelings.

Ukrainian always. In its entire history, Ukraine had only several brief glimpses at independence – a prime example of the brevity of its independent is the Ukrainian State, an anti-socialist formation within the territory of the current borders of contemporary Ukraine (minus Western Ukraine), that existed between April 29 and December 14, 1918, and was, in essence, a foreign-imposed provisional dictatorship ("Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States," 1999). As a contemporary nation, Ukraine has only enjoyed twenty-seven years of independence as of 2018. Interestingly enough, however, despite having been incorporated and assimilated into various countries and peoples, Ukrainians have maintained a sense of relatively consistent Ukrainian-ness, which varies in its intensity noticeably the more you travel from East to West, from weaker to stronger.

For example, for my Eastern interviewees, the idea of symbolic patriotism, as mentioned previously, is not as much a matter of principle – and they are quite aware of the stigma in a hyper-nationalist environment that their less pronounced Ukrainian identity brings:

> "… this Ukrainian-ness is different in the East for us. It's not the same as in the West, so, to me… To me, the Ukrainian identity, it's different than for someone from the West. But I am no less Ukrainian for it."

This conflict between *what is supposed to be Ukrainian* and *what Ukrainian is to me* is quite prominent among Easterners, and despite that, there is still a sense of identity – perhaps more of minority identity, in their case. It is quite peculiar how Russian is very widely

spoken all over Ukraine (save for the West), and yet, the apparent feeling of Russian speakers in Ukraine is that they don't measure up to some Ukrainian standard.

The difference here is that Eastern Ukrainians have an identity that is also more closely entangled with the Russian side of things. Eastern Ukrainians, at least those on the Ukrainian side of the current conflict, are becoming more politically aware; however, they are also likely to mention Russia as a reference point.

> "I: So, if they say you're [in English] *from Russia*, you'd say definitely not Russia.
> R: No! I'd scratch their throats! [laughs] [in English] *From Russia*! What [in English] *Russia*? No [in English] *Russia*! No, no, that's it.
> I: So, there is a sense of… well, not pride, but belonging.
> R: Yes, of course. Of course, there is."

At the same time, things are starting to shift now. The Easterners' awareness of their persistent Ukrainian identity throughout their lives previously is coming to the forefront of their minds, and though both people from there that participated in this study took a pacifist stance in the current conflict, they both claimed their belonging to the Ukrainian state and not the Russian. Perhaps, part of this is influenced by the fact that it is Eastern (and South) Ukraine whose territory is being 'reclaimed' by the Russian state – and this is a natural opposite reaction for those whose Ukrainian identity has been clear to them dating back to the Soviet Union.

Moving on to my participant from Kyiv, her identity shifts towards more 'traditionally Ukrainian.' The idea of Ukrainian empathy and capability becomes more salient in her speech, and she makes far more nationalist-leaning references when talking about what is happening in the country today. However, she also notes that she has never struggled with her Ukrainian-ness, save for in one particular context:

"But I never equated myself to the entire Soviet Union. Despite the fact that back then, in my passport, under nationality, I was written down as Russian, because my dad was Russian, and my last name is Russian… what kind of Ukrainian am I, with a name like that, but still… I was Ukrainian."

However, her warmth towards the Ukrainian state as an overarching idea is quite a bit higher in her discourse – there is a sense of belonging and appreciation that she mentions, and those feelings are what she claims kept her in the country despite having had the opportunity to leave.

Moving closer to the West, we shift from appreciation to something else – a more geographically-grounded, linguistic, traditional definition of Ukrainian. One of my participants mentioned her reconnection with her historical roots – in the sense that may Ukrainian people who had been born in the USSR had to be reintroduced to their history because of the Soviet censorship politics. This reintroduction touched a nerve – triggering questioning and a righteous kind of hostility towards the Soviet establishment.

Moving further West, the idea of Ukrainian-ness is tied with authenticity in a cultural sense – the kind of symbolic patriotism that was quite unfulfilled in the East. Western Ukraine for many years has been and fancied itself a keeper of the Ukrainian tradition – and therefore, the symbols are much more important to the people there.

Besides that, my interviewee said, there was never a return to Ukrainian after the fall of the Soviet Union like there had to be in Eastern and, to a lesser degree, Central Ukraine. Ukrainian has always been the language in use there – despite the many legal repercussions and obstacles it sometimes had to face.

"There was no question about returning to the Ukrainian language because my entire life, as far as I remember, we had only one Russian school. We had fourteen or fifteen schools in Dorohobych, in a city of eighty thousand people. And there was one Russian language school where people who were stationed there from other regions of Ukraine sent their children. After the declaration of independence, it carried on being Russian, but later its status changed."

So, if Eastern Ukraine had somewhat dipped its toes into the Russian identity inadvertently and unconsciously, for the most part; Western Ukraine had remained quite a monolith of Ukrainian culture. There is a reason that most people from the rest of the country who seek the Ukrainian tradition in the sense of clothing, food, and overall culture, gravitate toward cities like Lviv – because it is infused with its persistent Ukrainian-ness.

The Negative. In this section, I will proceed to expand on the themes that are associated with more negative sentiments and emotions. As mentioned before, this is not a moral stance on the participants' statements, rather, a measure of their own attitude towards the themes at hand.

No brotherhood. For many years, there has been a discourse coming mostly from the Russian side about the fraternal nature of the relationship between Russia and Ukraine. At first glance, it makes sense – Slavic roots, language group, shared languages, similarities in culture, as well as the historical twining of the two nation's fates. This is a theory of the All-Russian nation, first coined in the times of the Russian Empire, which attempted to base its hegemony on the idea that Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians ("Great Russians," "Little Russians," and "White Russians") comprised one single nation and identity (Zezulka-Mailloux, 2003). This policy was resurrected during the days of the Soviet Union to emphasize geographical and cultural unitedness and promote the idea of the single Soviet Nation (Hosking, 2006).

Currently, the policy has been emphasized once more by the Russian government in the context of the conflict in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, a dangerous kind of mentality, according to historian Timothy Snyder, this "Russian idea that Ukraine is not really a different country, but rather a kind of Slavic younger brother" (2013). It's not surprising that on the Ukrainian side, especially in the years since independence, there has been a more

colonial reading of these sentiments – that Ukraine was dominated by Russian, and then

Soviet, forces, and that and these cultural similarities had been taken advantage of and

exploited to build an unequal relationship based on imagined history and abuse.

This theme has been mentioned before throughout my analysis; however, it also needs

to be addressed as part of the Ukrainian identity. Similarly to the idea of Ukrainian-ness, this

idea of fraternity with Russia also falls on a gradient-like spectrum as you travel across

Ukraine geographically and linguistically.

Starting with Western Ukraine, there is a firm rejection of the idea of fraternity – and

historically, according to my participants from the region, this has always been the case.

> "Certainly, in Western Ukraine, there's no such brotherly nation, and there has never been […] there wasn't much love for them. They'd come and go; so, there wasn't much of a feeling that we were a single nation. I wouldn't say there was condescension…"

These historical roots, however, backed up by the feeling of injustice and repression,

have now branched off into nationalism and anti-Russian sentiments that may, by some, be

branded as problematic. However, given the psychological context of things, it appears to be

a natural consequence of everything mentioned above – to them, Russia has always been and

always will be the aggressor.

Moving closer to the center, my other Western Ukrainian participant issued not a

rejection, but a distancing of herself from Russia and the Soviet idea of fraternity.

> "So, for me, this was always very… I was neutral, because [boss's name] was very [in English] *hostile* [to Russians]. I tried to be neutral, not to have anything to do with them… in all the projects, [in English] *task forces*, and so on, in which Russians participated, I… I asked them to somehow [in English] *reshuffle* us. They'd ask me why, you're one territory, you're brotherly nations! I'd tell them no, we're not brotherly nations, [in English] *sorry*. I do not see us as… brotherly."

This kind of rejection is in general brought about by the broader awareness of how the

political scale has always been tipped in favor of the Russian majority. Learning about the

repressions Ukrainians had gone through historically, through the Ukrainian diaspora from abroad, had shaped her understanding of this supposed familial bond between Russia and Ukraine.

> "I am so thankful that he [the person who introduced her to history] first made all of us speak Ukrainian, he used his influence for us never to be adjacent to Russia, so I never had this kind of mix-up in my head, whether we're part of Europe or… to me, Ukraine had always been a part of the global world, not Russia for sure."

This kind of stark rejection softens the closer you get to the Russian border. The Eastern Ukrainian participants mentioned having family in Russia and having emotional ties to the country and the people themselves despite having ideological differences. Additionally, there is more of a tendency to excuse and try to level out the animosity between the two sides that are in conflict outside and within them:

> "… when I was in St. Petersburg, for example, when I went to see my father, I didn't sense any animosity towards Ukrainians… they're ordinary people; it's the politicians that create this conflict and this atmosphere, rather than the regular folk. Anyway, there are idiots in every nation. There always have been, there are, and there always will be."

There is also a tendency to speak more of fraternity in a distant, historically Soviet kind of way, mentioning the other Soviet nations – in the sense that the belief in this brotherhood of nations is a product of Soviet propaganda and genuine nostalgia for the days when relations were less strained and more simplistic:

> "It appeared to me as something powerful, and I liked the fact that I had brothers who were Kazakhs, Moldovans, and that we were all different but also somehow united. But as I said, after the collapse, I wasn't sorry about it. For some reason, I thought that despite the fact that we were an independent state now, we'd still be on good terms."

No nostalgia/pride. Connected to the idea of no fraternity is also the idea that there is no nostalgia or pride among the people I interviewed for the Soviet Union – and this comes with a kind of bitterness and regret as if things would have been better emotionally had the Soviet policies been juster.

"I was born in the Soviet Union, but that's not what this is about. It was a great bubble, a wonderful one but… I don't have any pride or nostalgia for it."

Part of the reason for this is the fact that during their formative years, the Soviet establishment and propaganda machine was already stagnating at the time. Therefore, their indoctrination was not as intense as it would have been in the older generation.

"Definitely not a Soviet child. Even at the end of high school, the Komsomol was almost non-existent, I remember being a pioneer, but the Komsomol… there were no marches. The Soviet Union had exhausted itself by the time I was fourteen."

Thus, the attachment of the Lost Generation to the USSR was already pretty loose – fueled by their curiosity and the increasing openness of the country to Western influences, which were new and exciting, and perceived as better, to a certain extent. Naturally, this feeling only grew when the system collapsed, and Ukraine set itself onto a pro-Western course.

Older generation. Another common negative theme among the Lost Generation is the perception of a generation rift between them and older people who had been more entrenched in Soviet ideology.

"Those who are about ten years older will say that things were better then and that they are proud of being born in the Soviet Union and working there."

This is understandable because, for many older people, the USSR provided work and stability, having given them a roof over their heads. A lot of people in the USSR were given apartments, jobs, and even cars by the government – granted, Ronald Raegan's original joke wasn't that far from the truth: people had to wait for years to get their benefits. On these benefits, one of my interviewees talked about his father:

"The Soviet Union was something… a structure that gave him the opportunity to break out of the village [laughs], to get an education, a job and… all his achievements. But he didn't resent when everything happened. He evaluated the situation, what was happening. Back then, he said that he got this and that from the Soviet Union, let's see what independent Ukraine will give. He viewed everything quite pragmatically."

This kind of thinking was rare in people of the older generation, and the fall of the USSR was hard for the participants' parents across the board – it was a collapse of a structure they had grown up and believed in. The Lost Generation, though, did not see it as such. They saw it as a window of opportunity.

> "I can say that they are kind of nostalgic. Because they grew up and became adults in the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union gave them a chance, for example, to travel around the entire country with their student cards, yeah? [laughs] Those legendary construction jobs and so on. And as my parents told me, they had a sense of unity, they were part of a huge country… with different nationalities and so forth. I think that for them it was stressful because they lost all of that."

When asked about their parents' reactions to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the participants mostly referred to uncertainty and to fear – something they themselves did not experience. Uncertainty, yes; however, fear was not on the table just because they were expecting things to shift, and because they were young enough to be able not to take it too hard.

> R: Because we should take away the 60+ generation's [people over the age of 60] right to vote.
> I: You think it's them?
> R: Yes.
> I: Those who still cling to this nostalgia?
> R: Yes. There are too many of them, and they are quite active, they're law-abiding. If they're told to vote, they go and vote.
> I: So, it's a purely [in English] generational rift?
> R: Yes, I think so… about five-four years we'll have to… I really hope that a new generation will come, with totally different values, totally different… not [in English] survivors, but…

The nostalgia the older generation now feels for the USSR is one of the stones of stumbling in the evolution of the intergenerational relationship. Now, like any conservative layer in any country, they vote for the sake of stability and resist change, which frustrates younger people. That, combined with the fact that Ukraine is an aging nation, is seen as a point of stagnation. Older people are subject to a lot of blame by the Lost Generation because of this.

Suffering. Ukraine, in many senses, had historically been a colonized nation. Perhaps not in the traditional sense of what the average Westerner would see as colonization, but there are various indicators as to how the Ukrainian people had been subject to abuse and control by invading forces. Despite the USSR's declaration of being anti-imperialist, critics argue that it practiced colonialism akin to that of Western empires (Caroe, 1953), based on political-military and cultural imperialistic forces which included Sovietization of local populations at the expense of their traditions (Tsvetkova, 2013).

> "But… as a result of various wars, geopolitical shifts and so on, Ukrainians were cut up, shuffled around, divided, pitted against each other, but there remains something until today that formed the traits that make us different from other nations."

On top of that was also the history of Soviet repressions in Ukraine, which are still coming to light as KGB archives are being begrudgingly opened to the public. According to a report made by the deputy director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory in 2012, from 1927 to 1990, over a million of people were arrested in Ukraine, of which over 50% were Ukrainian; and 140 thousand of which were executed by firing squad (Vedneev, 2012). According to a study conducted on an older generation of people, there is ambivalence in interpreting the Soviet repressions as evil. Some are ready to justify such actions by the government because of the complex economic and social conditions with the USSR, or even human evilness and cruelty of the individual people involved (Bayer & Martyshenko, 2016).

All of this historic memory with the added pressure of the Soviet propaganda machine comprised the political and emotional repression of the collective of the Ukrainian people. Suffering is a central theme in many ways to the Ukrainian experience – and though for many, overcoming this adversity was a productive thing, xenophobia and repressions are overall a negative experience for any group of people.

On the one hand, the Ukrainian capacity for empathy, as they call it, though reactionary, is a product of having to build resilience to adversity.

> "Because of all our tragedies, the Holodomor, and other things, Ukrainians have a lot of potential… for empathy […] what the Ukrainian people had been forced to survive all these years… our potential emotional range is much wider than anyone else's."

From this point of view, the idea of surviving and suffering and surviving again is a bittersweet notion – a concept that has damaged, destabilized, but also helped them grow as individuals and as a nation. Even though the Lost Generation is further from suffering political repressions and only refers back to the collective historical memory, they went through a lot of turmoil over the years of the collapse and rebuilding Ukraine from the ground up.

This kind of suffering, my interviewees say, resulted in survival and surprising adaptation; but in this adaptation, their identity was muddled and mixed with the everyday question of how to put bread on the table. Referring back to the theoretical hierarchy of needs, when one struggles to find money for food, they don't have much time to meditate on the nature of their identity and their relationship to the world. This is an opportunity their suffering took away from them, and there is regret associated with that.

Lost Generation. The final theme and perhaps one most summarizing of all the experiences described above is the theme of the *Lost Generation*. After analyzing the previous themes and having paid particular attention to the discourse of the people I interviewed, I came to realize that the Lost Generation isn't a stable, time-limited number of years; instead, it is a feeling. It is a feeling that follows any person who had had to live through a significant shift, where their values and their goals were put into question.

> "…in the former USSR, from the moment of the collapse, every generation, be it within ten years, seven years, three years, they will call themselves the [in English] *Lost Generation*. It's very upsetting… starting from the war, when everyone had to suffer, to

cling… sacrifices, everything. I think we need to live and create and get pleasure and [in English] *have fun and so on*. So, I hope that this Hemingway's [in English] *Lost Generation* will leave, the generation that lost its goals, the goals that were false. Like a carrot in front of a donkey, it's dangling somewhere, it's already dried up, and you're like a donkey, just walking, and walking, because you know that there's a carrot there somewhere… someone must have already eaten it, but you have to go forward anyway."

The discourse of the Lost Generation, whatever it is and however people identify within it, is that of a loss of values; a loss of self in the face of something bigger. Perhaps it is the historical injustice that had allowed Ukrainians to be more sensitive to other people's needs, but the constant need for survival and adaptation removed the stabilizing factor of having an imagined but very salient set of values to which one could refer.

Those values, shaky as they were, once removed, left the Lost Generation in a state of helplessness when it came to developing personal identities, which was not helped by the fact that they had to compromise their morals and ignore personal psychological needs for the sake of survival:

"We lacked the concept of [in English] *identity* because, in resilience and survival, we naturally lost our [in English] *self-identity*. We wanted everything, right now, and lots of it, and we were very busy…"

However, as harmful as the idea of the Lost Generation may be to the people that comprise it, there is also a hope within them that is entirely reactive to the adversities they have had to face. It also draws from the hope and anticipation of change they have experienced before the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is why, one of my interviewees says, it is important to them to send their children and members of the now-younger generation abroad, to allow them the kinds of experiences the Lost Generation hadn't been afforded.

"Today, technology, the media, everything is much more developed… I hope that… in the end, it will be on the brink between those two. And the understanding of what needs to be done and how. And the creation of a new culture, a new [in English] *identity*, a new mentality, a comprehensive, simple one, not verbalized but described

strategically… Hang on for another forty years, there's no money, but you hang on? No. I don't want to be the [in English] *the Lost Generation*. I'd like for this concept to end with us. [in English] *It should never be lost*."

Chapter 4: Discussion

The Lost Generation is a generation of believers and dreamers who had very little to believe in and dream about. They are products of the tumultuous time in which they had grown up. They are well aware of the fact that the kind of psychological and material stability they had needed back in the day is precious and hard to encounter. However, the people I interviewed appear to be ready to do their best to provide the tools the new generation needs to build a new set of values and create a much more integrated Ukrainian identity.

The psychological experiences of the Lost Generation are fraught with historical and social, political, and economic backgrounds that cannot be ignored when talking about the idea of transitioning from one identity to another. As this thesis is qualitative in nature, there are few if any direct and generalizable conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis presented. However, particular insights can arise from a study of such a nature.

First, the people of the Lost Generation I interviewed possess an identity that is both personal and national; both of these are closely intertwined with and impacted by external factors such as socioeconomic conditions and political shifts. Second, the loss of national identity, to the participants, resonates with the experience of personal and material loss. The recovery of this identity has to do with the restoration of their finances and social lives. Through their adaptation and coping to the socioeconomic realities of the time, the personal and national identities gained more footing.

Third, historical trauma transcends generations and brings up divisions within the now unified nation of Ukraine. In this case, bygones cannot be bygones, as there is still much historical resentment toward representatives of individual nations and peoples that had at one time or other annexed and ruled parts of the country. Connected to this is the issue of

language which to this day remains a painful subject to many people whose family and social lives had been put into question because of historical and political happenings. In this sense, historical trauma continues to place a lot of pressure on the development of the Ukrainian identity in the participants' narrative.

Finally, the boundary between nationalism, national identity, and patriotism in Ukraine is quite blurry. This blurriness contributes to some of the growing pains the Ukrainian identity is going through as it develops – such as the aforementioned language issue, and the idea of business development being so closely related to the oligarchy and the reactionary, resentful thought of, "what were we fighting for?" There is a sense of futility that in some respects seems to have reached fulfillment in the Lost Generation but in others, continues to increase the gap between people, families, generations.

The discussion of the Ukrainian identity, the identity of the Lost Generation, and the combination and synergy of the two, cannot be categorized strictly or follow a linear pattern due to the various external and internal powers and motivations at play that interact with each other to create the internal monologue that is the story of each individual participant. East participant is shown to have dealt with a traumatic situation – or a series of traumas – in their own way, and in that, they had cultivated a sense of self within the psychology of their own mind and that of the broader Ukrainian society. It goes to show that external factors such as politics and the economy cannot be fully detached from the personal narrative of the speaker whose identity shifts are being examined.

Nevertheless, the emergent themes within this work can be loosely classified into more-or-less chronological categories: ones that have to do with confronting the collapse, surviving it, and the developing Ukrainian identity and divisions within and around it. While the first two have more to do with personal reactions to external events and the participants' interactions with them, the last one is more of a consequence of the various historical and

political shifts that had happened throughout the history of Ukraine and specifically during the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

It is quite startling how, despite having been fraught with historical and lived trauma, the minds of the participants all appeared to be working toward a sense of fulfillment, a dream, a future – and a chance for the next generations to live the life the Lost Generation thought they themselves deserved. This idea of individual work for the greater good is perhaps one of the most beautiful conclusions of what it meant to have been caught between two worlds with a foot in both and neither.

The conscious choice of not separating the personal and political too much in analyzing the themes was dictated by the material presented to me in the interviews. From the very first interview, as the researcher, I knew there would be too much entanglement between the two, that only a synergetic analysis of both at once could do the interviewees' experience justice.

This study contributes to the literature on Ukrainian identity and its development throughout the unstable and tumultuous history of the country, and allows for the exploration of the experiences of people in other countries whose national and personal identities had suffered changes due to geopolitical shifts. This study also involves an examination of the hegemony the Soviet ideological machine had imposed on the nations that had been involved in the USSR and the resulting mindsets it had created.

Additionally, this study is an insight on the experience of the people of the Lost Generation in Ukraine, the takeaways from which may be useful in counseling people from this population or populations who had gone through the same kind of traumatic experience. The idea of the loss of identity, be it personal or national, is essential in the therapeutic process and must be taken into account when working with a client like this. It is also important to remember that the loss of perspective during the early years or professional

activity do affect young adults in these kinds of populations. Plus, when counseling clients from the Lost Generation, one must also take into account all the political and social influences their life had taken on – down to the language in which therapy may be conducted. The careful consideration of these choices is imperative to a successful outcome in treatment.

Limitations

This study is qualitative in nature, and the sampling was purposive. Therefore, there can be certain limitations when it comes to demographics: all but one people in this study currently lived in Kyiv, the capital of the country; this speaks to their economic and professional affluence, therefore rendering this study slightly one-sided due to the lack of diversity in terms of socioeconomic status. Given that there were only five participants, there is hardly any generalizability. Further research of a more quantitative nature is necessary to determine whether the results of this study can be generalized. Additionally, it is important to remember the context of the participants when reading this report – not only their demographic background but also the sociopolitical and military context of what is currently happening in Ukraine (Levitt et al., 2018).

Additionally, there is no measure in qualitative research of what constitutes a theme; therefore, these themes were selected as the most prominent from the standpoint of this researcher, and the quantitative merit assigned to their usage by me may come in question. However, these themes were selected carefully to create a complete and broad perspective on the psychology of the people described in the study. The thematic rather than chronological organization of this thesis was chosen to highlight the constant flux and circular nature of the themes throughout history (Levitt et al., 2018).

There is also no quantitative measure of what constitutes a stable Ukrainian national identity – partially because nationalism and patriotism and the individual's relationship to both and either one has very blurry definitions in the broader discourse of what it means to be

Ukrainian. Therefore, one cannot with complete certainty claim to be closer to or farther from the 'true Ukrainian experience.' Thus, given the small sample of cases in this study, as well as the conditions under which the research was done – in a developing fledgling country that is also currently at war with a larger neighbor, there is no telling whether this current definition of what it means to be Ukrainian is a stable one.

One of the most important considerations in reading this study is the fact that I, as the researcher, am close to the subject. Being Ukrainian and having been born just after the declaration of independence, and now, with the ongoing war with Russia, there are many themes in this study that resonated personally with me. Therefore, I cannot guarantee a bias-free, dispassionate analysis – however, in this case, I think it is essential to have a researcher whose personal interests and background are very close to the experiences of the participants in question, to communicate the cultural and historical background and give the analysis better context. For the sake of this report being read as qualitative, it is important to note the context of the researcher and the process of analyzing and reporting when considering transparency (Levitt et al., 2018).

Having considered everything, I would like to encourage fellow researchers to study further the phenomenon of transitional generations such as the Lost Generation presented in the current study; while taking into account the historical, social, political, economic, and personally psychological aspects of their narrative.

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