

PERSPECTIVE PIECES

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CONFLICT OF IDENTITIES: UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

Abstract. *The purpose of the research is to theoretically substantiate the position on the specificity of cultural identities of Ukraine and Russia in their historical context of existence. **The research methodology** defines bibliographic, analytical, comparative, descriptive, deductive methods, as well as the method of historical reconstruction, which allowed to analyze the differences between Ukrainian and Russian cultural identities. **The scientific novelty** is the use of a comprehensive approach to the study of Ukrainian and Russian cultural identities, which includes religious and ideological factors. The problem of cultural identity is considered in several aspects, primarily in worldview and history. The religious foundations of the national worldview have been studied. Historical analysis has revealed key differences between the cultural identities of Ukrainian and Russian societies in the development of the two countries. Significant factors have been demonstrated, the factors that led to the cultural movement of Ukrainian society to Europe in contrast to the Russian one with its ideological conservatism. **Conclusion.** Based on the analysis of the peculiarities of Ukrainian and Russian cultural identities using an integrated approach, we substantiated the specifics of cultural identities of Ukraine and Russia in the historical context and the situation of overcoming Soviet thinking and its remnants in the mentality of Eastern Europe.*

Keywords: *cultural identity, Ukraine, Russia, religion, ideology, national worldview, specifics of cultural identities, Eastern Europe*

Relevance of the topic. *Russia's war against Ukraine which started on February 24 was an assault on Ukrainian national identity, first of all. Driven by the "Russian world" ideology provided by the Russian Orthodox Church,*

Kremlin's army invaded a sovereign territory of a 40-mln nation to demonstrate the whole world that all these people with Ukrainian passports are de facto Russians.

This is wrong. Ukraine's almost 31 year of independent existence proves a totally different narrative: this is a country with own national, political, societal, economic traditions that are unique to it.

Formulation of the problem. Ukrainian society has own identity which is basis for its own nationhood and statehood. Kremlin denies this.

Russian leader Vladimir Putin often justifies his reasoning with historical arguments, trying to persuade his audience that since 1654, when then Russian Empire signed a "mutual integration" document with Ukraine's leader Bogdan Hmelnytsky, these two nations have been one by its nature and historical calling.

However, Hmelnytsky never signed a "mutual integration" document with Russia and its then czar Aleksey The Most Silent (Romanov). Instead, Ukrainian Cossack leader signed a document with established a formalized framework for mutual security and military efforts.

Vladimir Putin doesn't recognize the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, which was created under leadership of Vladimir Lenin, a newspaper columnist turned politician, in December 1922. Putin calls the 1991 event a "biggest tragedy for Russia". But de facto this is his personal tragedy as Putin inherited lots of features of own political style from all of the Soviet leaders, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin included.

Purpose of the article. One should take a look at medieval history of Eastern Europe to get a proper understanding of the nature of Ukraine–Russian neighborhood.

Here are the key facts: Ukraine was christened in the year of 988 by bishop Myhailo of Bizantium Church who later was elevated to the Metropolitan of Kyiv status. Previously, Ukraine was visited by apostle Andrew in I century AD (Kartashov, 2020).

Presentation of the topic. Apostle Andrew was one of the 12 apostles, according to Bible, who didn't have much text, or any other evidence devoted to him in early Christian writings – whether by Jewish, Egyptian Hellenic or Greek authors – but he was quite a prominent man cooperating with apostle Paul, one of 70 apostles. Early Christian expansion included three major missions: Roman (conducted by apostle Peter), Greek (apostle Paul) and Northern (apostle Andrew). That is the reason why the latter visited what is now Ukraine.

Apostle Andrew, most likely, preached in Greek to the local community of Trypillya culture, served liturgies and provided church sacraments. However, seeing no major political developments in this area he soon left – probably in North-Western direction, which is now territory of Poland and Baltic countries.

That's the Byzantium mission of X century that introduced Kyiv to a full-scale Christian expansionary mission in an eastern rite version.

Russia didn't have any official Christian institutions at that point, though the IX century mission by Bulgarian monks Cyril and Methodius did provide some basic religious literacy to what Russia's central region is now after they visited Kyiv (Kartashov, 2020).

It took a Christian mission from Kyiv in XI century to bring Christianity in its eastern rite version to what is now Russia. It needs to be explained what Eastern Rite Christianity looked like at that historical period. Based on Syrian liturgical tradition, it still shared most of the dogmatic teaching with Western Rite Christianity but had a different set of priorities where personal salvation was superior to the church's social and maybe even political mission.

Going back to Kyiv's mission to then-Russia. The mission was led by Kyiv Pechersk Lavra monks and was happening in north-western region of the contemporary geography of the Russian Federation (Ogienko, 1992, 1993).

However, this very mission wasn't very successful with only a handful of Russians taking Christian religion seriously. At that point, Siberian shamanism and so called "hlystovstvo", a mystical tradition from Central Russia, were key drivers for religious development of that geography (Fedotov, 1996–2000; Florenskiy, 2004–2005). Another important religious development came from a movement called "skopstvo" which stood for spiritual self-punishment and celibacy. During later ages, this helped to bring strong grounds under Russian monastic traditions within the Russian Orthodox Church.

In XIV century, a Christian monk named Sergius started own mission to Russia and founded a Monastery of Holy Trinity in Radonezh (later Zagorsk, now Sergiyev Posad), close to Moscow. Later this monk became known as Sergiy of Radonezh.

It's likely the monk was of Ukrainian descent who received some education in Western Europe and Greece. He had a Latin approach in his theology and knew monastic traditions of Greek monasteries very well, having experienced some influences of St. Gregory Palama, archbishop of Thessaloniki (Kovalev, 2007; Tuptalo, 2005).

Russian official history never recognized these facts properly. For them, it's Russia and Metropolitan of Moscow who were teaching Ukrainians how to develop own Christianity.

But let's dig deeper – all the way to IV century BC. Antique Ukraine then had a prevailing culture called Trypillya. That was a phenomenon of a mix between influences from ancient Greek, Turk, Iranian and Indian sources that ancient Ukrainians accepted in their own special way. For Greece, this was the time of Alexander the Macedonian, Plato and Aristotle, while Trypillya was more

about art (ceramics) than philosophy and outstanding verbal culture (Hvoyka, 1901; Vovk, 1995; Losev, 2000).

Russia at that point was having a Paleolithic Age (Stone Age). The prevailing culture was formed by Mordovian tribes from what is now Mordva Autonomous Republic within the Russian Federation with Saransk as capital city (Gumilyov, 2012; Bahtin, 1973).

Mordovian religion was a cult of dead from a subset of mortal religions born in ancient Egypt which at that time was turning to a pre-Christian monotheism (faith in God Ra). Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church still pays lots of attention to the mortal cult, having an emphasis in its theology on making sacred services in the name of those who died. Besides, this Church also inherited a lot from Siberian shamanism – like sacred substances (water, bread, oil) as a stand-alone spiritual track outside the theology of Eucharist etc (Bulgakov, 1994; Florenskiy, 2004, 2005).

Mordva and Trypillya provided Russia and Ukraine respectively with their cultural DNAs. In the later centuries, Mordva failed to become a prosperous, developed region. Trypillya did become such a region. This area residential center is the town of Ukrayinka to the South of Kyiv that is a place for major business assets (energy, real estate) that have their own investment attractiveness.

While Mordva was a deeply religious culture with all the existing agricultural and construction economy based on the cycle of religious services, Trypillya was much closer to antique religion of Greece. Residents of Trypillya region, close to contemporary Kyiv, had respect for Greek gods and overall believed in a pantheistic version of religion of "mother-nature" (Ogienko, 1992, 1993; Hvoyka, 1901; Vovk, 1995).

Mordovians at that time had their own monotheism built on faith in Baba Yaga, a female devil-type god. However, at a later stage, when Mordovian religion was interacting with Russian medieval Christianity, it was different. Mordovian religion prior to this interaction experienced influence of Iranian Zoroastrianism and had a better understanding of importance of a positive religious narrative. For that purpose, Mordovian cult servicemen came up with the image of Nesmeyana, a positive female god and an antidote to Baba Yaga (Florenskiy, 2004–2050; Gumilyov, 2012; Ogienko, 1992, 1993).

Having two deeply different religious traditions, then-Ukraine and then-Russia were pursuing two totally different paths of development that continued during later ages, including medieval times. While Ukraine was a pro-European culture, Russia was pro-Asian.

Medieval Ukraine became a totally Christian nation that followed all the theological lines of the Christian Church that came from the Roman Empire. Meanwhile, Russian nation for ages was following own paganistic traditions that

was a problem and led to poor development of any educational institutions. Ukraine's earliest higher schools go back to XVI century and Volyn region, while Kyiv Pechersk Lavra had own theological school since XI century but it wasn't a transparent one and didn't accept all who wanted to study philosophy, literature or theology (Krymsky, 2002–2003; Chayka, 1997).

Things began changing in XVII-XVIII centuries. Russian czar Petr I (Romanov) was a big fan of Western European culture which is why his era became a time for creating first Russian higher schools of education. Moreover, He brought catholic-trained archbishop Theophan Prokopovych from Kyiv Mogyla Academy to St. Petersburg to oversee the pro-Western reforms of the Russian Orthodox Church. This academy in Kyiv was founded in 1615 as Kyiv Brotherhood School and later led by Metropolitan Petro Mogyla of Kyiv, a Moldovan priest who became a monk at Kyiv Pechersk Lavra and stated own Ukrainian identity (Nichyk, 1997; Zhukovsky, 1997).

Mogyla was a pro-Catholic bishop who did a major rewriting of the liturgy code for the Ukainian Orthodox Church that was part of the Constantinople Patriarchate at that time. Metropolitan Mogyla seeked an opportunity to gain a cardinal nomination from Vatican, but refused to step back from Orthodox dogmas. However, he served liturgies in Lviv with Antin Selyava, Roman Catholic Eastern Rite bishop of Kyiv who never visited Kyiv but was nominated to this diocese which was a common practice back then and remains this way nowadays for some Vatican-ruled dioceses.

During XIX century most of Ukrainian territory was a part of Russian empire, while its western region was structured as several provinces (Galychyna, Volyn, Bukovyna, Ungvar) within the Austro-Hungarian empire. That's when Russia started claiming that Ukrainians and Russians are the same nation.

Such an idea was based on a XVI century concept of a Moscow as the Third Rome (after Rome and Constantinople) which was formulated by Elder Filofey of Pskov. Then, it had the XIX century religious paradigm that Russia has a better, more pure Christian Orthodoxy than catholic-leaning Ukraine. Moscow Metropolitan Platon (Levshin) put it this way, while talking to Denis Diderot: "Sayeth an insane man in thy heart – nay God". (Anisov, 2009). That meant, all the other Christian faiths outside Russian orthodoxy were closer to heresy and even atheism than to true Christianity.

Great Russian writers of the XIX and early XX centuries didn't write much about Ukraine, but made their own contribution in glorifying so called "Russian world", Russian monarchy and Russian Empire. However, it's Ivan Goncharov that in one of his novels – "Obryv" – wrote extensively on economic problems of then Russia that didn't provide much opportunity for residents of the agriculture regions. Fedor Dostoevskiy, another Russian novelist of that era, was de facto a

dissident within the Russian cultural elite, but had own nationalistic views that were later used for the purposes of developing the "Russian world" concept.

Idea of Russian superiority toward Ukraine re-emerged in XX century with creation of the Soviet Union in 1922. Though Lenin-led Soviet Russia recognized Ukraine's independence in 1921 under the Riga Peace Agreement, Soviet Union decided to occupy Ukraine a year later.

The Holodny Yar oppression in 1920s, Great Golodomor Famine in 1932–1933, post-World War II Famine in 1946–1947, so called "Internationalism Policy" in 1960–1970s all had features of either ethnic genocide or a Ukraine-focused repression that was meant to push Ukrainians to identify themselves either as Russians or as Soviets. Russian identity for Ukrainians was a preferred choice for the Communist Party of the USSR, while Soviet identity, that was an ideological instrument for Baltic and Caucasus socialist republics, was a second choice (Gorlis-Gorsky, 2016; Shapoval, 2021; Hill, 2021).

Interesting things were happening in Kyiv in 1941–1945, during the German invasion of the World War II era. Again, this time took lots of effort to re-think Ukrainian identity by all kinds of actors – Germans, Russians and Ukrainians themselves.

In April 1942 a group of Ukrainian bishops led by archbishop Polikarp (Sikorsky) of Lutsk made a canonical decision to establish the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church that was immediately recognized by the Polish Orthodox Church whose autocephaly was, in its turn, recognized by the Constantinople Patriarchate in 1924.

Most of these bishops that created Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church were consecrated in St. Andrew Cathedral in Kyiv, a XVIII century Christian site built by Italian religious architecture artist Francesco Rastrelli, a heavy reader of Immanuel Kant, philosopher from Germany.

Some consecrations involved participation of archbishop Aleksandr Inozemtsev of Pinsk, Belarus. Seeking a better understanding of Ukrainian identity, Autocephalous Church bishops admitted that Ukrainians and Belarussians have too much in common with some similarities on own ethnic DNA going back to the medieval times and later ages when both, Ukraine and Belarus, were a part of Rzeczpospolita, a major Central European state (Smyrnov, 2009; Stepovyk, 2007).

On May 24, 1942, archbishop Nikanor (Abramovych) served the liturgy in St. Andrew Cathedral with bishop Mstyslav (Skrypnyk) whom he consecrated to the highest church spiritual rank a little bit earlier, on May 12. The liturgy was attended by Erich Koch, Adolf Hitler's Reichskommissar for Ukraine. Both, Hitler and Koch were later condemned for committing war crimes.

During that liturgy, Erich Koch said that he recognizes Ukraine as an independent nation that has a full right for own historical development. Koch was well prepared on nationhood matters as he was a voracious reader of Georg Hegel's philosophy. For this statement to be made, archbishop Nikanor and bishop Mstyslav had to admit own loyalty go to Germany. Later, bishop Mstyslav was arrested by the German administration in Ukraine and received a prison term in the city of Pryluky, close to Chernigiv, Ukraine's Northeast. In Pryluky prison, Mstyslav (Skrypyk) was followed by hieromonk Ivan (Smyrnov, 2009).

The main conclusion of the synod of Ukrainian Autocephalous Church bishops, that was consulted on canonic and theological matters by Kyiv-based Georgian archbishop Antonius Demetrius (Abashydze), was that Ukraine is an independent nation with own, clearly unique identity. However, Russian Orthodox Church didn't properly recognize this. It had its own bishop for Kyiv – metropolitan Nikolay Yarushevich, Lithuania-born Christian activist.

Metropolitan Yarushevich didn't stay in Kyiv during the German invasion, but in 1939–1940 served liturgies with archbishop Polikarp (Sikorskiy) who was later condemned by the Russian Orthodox Church for refusing to pledge loyalty to Moscow. When asked by the Russian patriarch Aleksiy I (Simanskiy) in 1945 to prepare a research note on Ukrainian identity, metropolitan Yarushevich admitted: Ukrainians are a separate nation with a unique culture. This was a very unpopular view within the Russian Orthodox Church.

Conclusion. In early 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed, majority of Russians, according to Levada polls in Moscow, still thought Ukrainians, as well as Belarussians, are a part of the Russian nation that committed a "crime" of trying to become an independent state. Russian then President Boris Yeltsin, a politician with pathological dependence on alcohol, didn't share this view, but neither he was vocal on this.

When Vladimir Putin became Russian president in 2000, he started to rule out many of the features of the Yeltsin's pro-Ukrainian stance in Russian foreign policy which included gas subsidies, bond-buying programs and grants for Ukrainian educational institutions as well as academic opportunities for Ukrainian professors and teachers. The latter were especially popular in the Donbas that Putin invaded in 2014, hiring a private military operative Igor Strelkov-Girkin, a suspect in the Hague Court case on downing the MH17 Boeing in the Donbas skies on July 17, 2014.

A basic view of an ordinary Russian in the 2000s was that Ukraine eventually would go back to the Russian political rule, though the path for this remained unclear. After conducting an attempt to establish a sustainable control over Ukraine in 2014–2015, Vladimir Putin made another attempt in 2022, invading Ukraine with Russian troops on February 24.

Putin's thinking and decision-making on Ukraine included his intention to focus on developing some pro-Russian sentiments in the Ukrainian society as well as pro-Soviet nostalgia that may still be found in the country's Eastern and Southern regions. Ukrainian parliament used to host pro-Russian factions and MPs, some of them even had ministerial positions.

It's 2022 now, but Vladimir Putin still can't admit that Ukraine is an independent nation, a sovereign state and a self-reliant economy who shares a lot with the economy of the European Union. He still tries to rewrite the history of previous centuries, especially of the XX century, to make it possible to speculate on matters of the national identity.

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