DEBATES ABOUT UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: HETEROGLOSSIA AND POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY[1]

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1. Introduction

Constituents of the Ukrainian national identity cluster have been sharply contested in the second decade of Ukrainian independence. The interpretation of the Ukrainian relationship with neighbouring Russia remains crucial to the nation-building process. The fact that 'everywhere in contemporary Ukraine, Ukrainian national culture exists alongside Russian culture and is surrounded by Russian culture, including Russian culture produced by both Russians and Ukrainians'[2] has been considered as a sign of national weakness by Ukrainian and Russian politicians. The purpose of this paper is to analyse debates about the Ukrainian national identity cluster. The claims of Russian and Ukrainian ideologists, i.e. public figures who endorse and interpret social values[3], have been analysed with the aim of uncovering their underlying assumptions regarding the notion of nationhood. The political implications entailed for Ukraine have also been considered. Public discourse[4] centred around the topic of Ukrainian national identity, reveals that its participants adhere to the dogma of homogeneity . This dogma is '[a] view of society in which differences are seen as dangerous and centrifugal, and in which the "best" society is suggested to be one without intergroup differences.' [5] The illustration of the

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[2] Ivan Dziuba, 'Chy usvidomliuiemo natsional'nu kul'turu iak tsil'nist'?'[Do we perceive the integrity of the national culture?] *Nauka i kul'tura* No 22 (Kyiv: Znannia, 1988), 309-25, here 315 quoted from M. V. Strikha, 'Cultural policy in Ukraine', *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, Vol.20, Nos. 1-2, 2006, 101-117, here 102.

[3] See T.A. Van Dijk, 'Discourse, Power and Access', in C.R. Caldas-Coulthard and M. Coulthard (eds) *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*, (London: Routledge, 1996): 84-104.

[4] Musolff defines public discourse as 'a virtual conversation within and between communities'. See A. Musolff *Metaphor and political discourse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 5

[5] J., Blommaert and J., Verschueren, 'The role of language in European nationalist ideologies' *Pragmatics* 1992, 2:3, 355-375, here 362.

desire for a homogeneous nation is the political crusade for making Ukraine a monolingual state[6]: ideologists from one side claim that Ukrainian should be imposed upon all Ukrainian citizens, whereas others consider Russia and Ukraine to be inseparable and, hence, Ukrainian should become redundant. The paradox is that the aspiration for homogeneity in reality creates torrents of instability. A lack of familiarity with the nation-building practices over the globe is to blame for many misconceptions which have emerged in the debates.

2. Method and data

Blommaert and Verschueren[7] in their analysis of European nationalist ideologies and the Belgian 'discourse of ethnic tolerance' examined the linguistic environment and structure of arguments accommodating the concepts of 'national identity' and 'language'. I adopted the procedures set by the Belgian linguists. Several claims of Russian and Ukrainian public figures have been examined in order to profile their argumentative strategies in use. The argumentative strategies tailored for a specific argumentative purpose incorporate political myths, references to scholarly concepts and cultural practices. A political myth is understood as a cognitive device which reduces the complexity of the real social world and enables people to act as a member of a social group; it also legitimises the actions of community members and delegitimize the actions of their opponents[8]. One of the most common political myths is the nation-state conception equating cultural and political entities. In other words, distinct nations define distinct states. Contrary to this common perception, many nations such as Kurds, Scots, Catalans, Tamils and others are stateless. The state often unifies several cultural communities. The same nation can form several states which are perceived as separate nations afterwards. Another popular cultural myth is the linguistic framing of nationhood that maintains that 'the absence of a specific language as a distinctive feature immediately casts a shadow on a group's claims to nationhood'.[9] Ernest Renan demonstrated how misleading this common perception was in the 19th century: 'The United States and England, Latin America and Spain, speak the same language yet do not

[6] S. Yekelchyk , 'Writing the History of Ukrainian Culture, before, under, and after Communism', *Australasian Slavonic and East European Studies* Vol. 20, No 1-2 (2006), 15-37, here 34, argues that "open defence of the de facto bilingualism that exists in Ukraine is extremely rare..."

[7] Blommaert and Verschueren 1992 and Blommaert and Verschueren *Debating diversity: Analysing the discourse of tolerance*.(London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

[8] See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1990); B. Anderson *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); C.G. Flood, *Political Myth. A Theoretical Introduction* (New York: Garland, 1996); J. E. Joseph *Language and identity : National, ethnic, religious* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

[9] Blommaert and Verschueren 1996, 134.

form single nations'[10]. Cultural practices of Scots also undermine the conception of language as the keystone of nation:

> In the case of Scotland, where two separate national languages emerged (Gaelic and Scots, or the Celtic and Germanic provinces respectively), their coexistence has not favoured the development of linguistic nationalism, but has impeded it, as partisans of the two languages have focused much of their energies on combating the rival claims of the other rather than the hegemony of English. Although this makes Scotland sound like a failure in national linguistic terms, the vast majority of Scots do not see it this way; they consider the strategic economic value of using a world language as greatly outweighing the political, cultural and sentimental value of the 'heritage' languages.[11]

Yet the two myths form the backbone of nearly all discussions about Ukrainian national identity in post-Soviet discourse. Other misconceptions can also be found alongside these myths. The discourse strategies of post-Soviet ideologists have been used for achieving specific purposes such as manufacturing insults, (de)legitimisation of a particular political orientation, and striking a cord of solidarity with the audience[12]. The argumentative strategies in the debates target two conflicting goals 1) justification of unbreakable ties between Russia and Ukraine resulting in the necessity of having common unitarian statehood or 2) legitimisation of the exclusion of Russian from Ukrainian cultural and political life. These goals are pursued by different political forces within both Russia and Ukraine. The statements from Russian and Ukrainian ideologists are not mutually exclusive: their positions either coincide or incite counterarguments.

In this paper, Russian views regarding the status of Ukrainian national identity have been extracted both from statements of Kremlin political analysts and from oppositionists to the ruling elite. The position of the ruling elite in Russia is reflected in the views of Alexander Dugin, a right-wing Russian politician[13] and professor of Moscow State University, who is allegedly

[10] Ernest Renan, 'What is a nation?' in Homi K. Bhabha, (ed), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 8-22, here 16.
[11] Joseph, 94
[12] Musolff suggests that the argumentative purposes are 'thematic dimensions/perspectives that have been introduced into the discourse by the speaker to achieve specific argumentative objectives'. See Musolff,113
[13] In 2002 Alexandr Dugin organized the Eurasia party which aimed at the restoration of the Russian Empire through the acquisition of Georgia and Ukraine and the formation of an alliance with Turkey.

supported by the Kremlin and the Russian military[14]. I examined his claims in combination with the opinions of Mikhail Leontyev, another political analyst enjoying prominence in the Russian press and known for his controversial remarks about former Soviet Republics. The views of the Russian opposition has been extracted from interviews of Valeria Novodvorskaya, a Russian liberal politician[15], a founder of the party 'Democratic Unity' and a member of the editorial board of the liberal Russian magazine 'The New Times'. Valeria Novodvorskaya is an outspoken critic of the Putin and Medvedev governments and an experienced oppositionist. She was a Soviet dissident who launched protests against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Novodvorskaya has voiced many controversial statements, stirring a divided reaction among the general public and politicians.

Professor Dmitry Tabachnik, a historian and present Minister of Ukrainian Education and Sciences, a member of the ruling party 'Regions'[16], represents pro-Russian views in the Ukrainian discourse. The opposition to the 'Regions', has been represented by the group of the so-called nationally conscious Ukrainians[17]. They are a broad category of conspicuous patriots. As a rule, nationally conscious Ukrainians have been affiliated with the Orange coalition, which governed prior to the victory of the present 'pro-Russian' President V. Yanukovych. Views of the educationalists, (gathered on the occasion of celebration of the ex-President V. Yushchenko victory at the conference 'Contemporary Ukrainian culture: The European and Global Context', Monash University 2005) have been examined in this paper. The main contributors to the conference proceedings have been Professor Maria Zubrytska, Vice Rector at the Ivan Franko National University of L'viv and Maxim Srikha, Director of the Research Programmes at the Open Politics Institute in Kiev. All the participants in the virtual debates on the Ukrainian national identity either summarise popular perceptions of nationhood or attempt to provide a theoretical framing of such perceptions. Different discursive modes of analysed publications have converged into the general style of political manifesto, as ideologists use every opportunity

[14] A. Shekhovtsov, A. Umland, 'Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist? "Neo-Eurasianism" and Perennial Philosophy'. *The Russian review* (68), 2009, 662-78; A. Wilson, *Virtual Politics. Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); R., Horvath, 'Beware the Rise of Russia's New Imperialism', 'The Age', August 21, 2008.

[15] See A. Lukin, *The Political Culture of the Russian "Democrats"* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[16] 'Regions' chaired by the present Ukrainian Prime-Minister M. Azarov and enlist President V. Yanukovych among its members

[17] See M. Srikha,'Cultural Policy in Ukraine (1991-2005)', *Australian Slavonic and Eastern European Studies* Vol. 20, No 1-2 (2006),101-116, here 105; and D. Tabachnik *Utinyi Sup Po-Ukrainski: Besedy s Ukrainskim Politikuumom: Dialogi s Glukhimi* [Duck soup, Ukrainian style: Conversation with the Ukrainian political mind: Dialogue with the deaf], (Kharkov: Pholio, 2008)

for sharing their thoughtful considerations with the broader public. The analysis of the assumptions underlying the position of ideologists allows for a re-creation of theoretical and common beliefs influencing social preferences and the political landscape in Russia and Ukraine. Since most of the ideologists invoke a limited range of nation-building experience, their views have been contrasted with case studies on multilingual factors in nation-building processes world-wide[18].

3. National identity

Scholars and ideologists are usually unanimous in saying that national identity is a sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group. Moreover, most of them admit explicitly or covertly that national identity is based on ethnic and cultural ties and self-determination[19]. The main problem with arguments in post-Soviet discourse is the failure to recognise 'the dynamic nature of identity, and the linguistic negotiations that play a role in it'[20]. Russian and Ukrainian ideologists define national differences through a fixed and distinctive cluster of attributes. Properties such as descent, history, culture, religion and language[21] are indeed central for the discussion of the nationhood. However, cultural practices of re-shaping the national identity cluster through changing and combining its constituents have been neglected in the post-Soviet discourse[22]. The ideas of Ernest Renan, whose astute insight inspired the general Western European idea of nation, have been overlooked by post-Soviet ideologists. Renan argues: 'The existence of a nation is [..]a daily plebiscite' , 'present-day consent, the desire to live together.'[23] Hence, the willingness of people to live together or live separately from another nation may outweigh the importance of language as an identity marker. Any constituents of the cluster, such as language, can be either overemphasised or excluded. The importance of language in defining national identity was stressed by German intellectuals,[24] e.g. Fichte in his address to the German nation in 1806[25]. The linguistic framing of nationhood was an essential part of the German counter-reaction to Napoleonic expansionism. The linguistic argument also justified the annexation of the disputed territory of Alsace-Lorrain from France. By contrast, the French idea

[18] See Joseph.
[19] See Hobsbawm, 102
[20] Blommaert and Verschueren 1998, 134
[21] Blommaert and Verschueren 1992, 359; see the adaptation of the cluster theory in M. Zubrytska,' Between Scylla and Chayibdis: Prospects and Challenges for Ukrainian Culture in the Current Global Context', *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* Vol. 20, No 1-2 (2006), 1-14, here 9-10.
[22] See examples in Joseph.
[23] Ernest Renan, 'What is a Nation?' in Homi K. Bhabha, (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 8-22, here 19.
[24] See Joseph, 98-99, Blommaert and Vershueren 1992, 363-364.
[25] J.Y. Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation* translated by R.F. Jones and G.H. Turnbull, ed. by G.A. Kelly (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1968)

of nationhood invokes language as an administrative means for state-wide communication and stressed the territoriality[26]. The French nationalist view was shaped in the process of national unification that commenced after the French Revolution, when French was shared by less than 50% of the population[27]. On the other hand, the diminishing importance of language in the conception of nationhood stemmed from French counterclaims in the dispute with Germany over the title to Alsace-Lorraine[28]. Renan's conceptualisation of the nation, centred around 'a rich legacy of memories' and 'the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage [of memories]', enabled France to trump German linguistic arguments in the Alsace-Lorraine dispute. Since language was not the crucial factor in the issue of nationhood, the Germanic speaking population of Alsace-Lorraine could be recognised as a part of the French nation.

Post-Soviet ideologists are not familiar with Renan's insight on the nature of nationhood. In their opinion, Renan introduced the extreme view on the exclusion of the language factor from the national features cluster .[29] It is worthwhile noting that features other than language representing the national identity cluster can also be negligible. Renan argues that '[r]eligion cannot supply an adequate basis for the constitution of the modern nationality either.'[30] For instance, the Lebanese nation includes both Christians and Muslims[31]. The descent feature has been challenged on numerous other occasions. As Renan stipulates, '[t]he noblest countries, England, France and Italy, are those where the blood is the most mixed.'[32] The African roots of Alexander Pushkin do not prevent him being the great Russian poet. Kenyan ancestry did not prevent Barak Obama from becoming the President of the United States and defending American national interests. The Hungarian origin of Nicolas Sarkozi did not prevent the French people from casting their votes and electing him President of France. In short, there are 'no fixed conditions'[33] or 'objective criteria'[34] for defining national boundaries.

4. Disputed constituents of Ukrainian national identity

[26] Renan, 16 argues: 'An honourable fact about France is that she has never sought to win unity of language by coercive measures'.
[27] See Blommaert and Vershueren 1992, 364
[28] Joseph, 112 explains that Alsace and Lorraine were the "territories which had repeatedly shuttled between French and German rule, where the local dialects were Germanic but the political allegiance of the populace was strongly to France."
[29] Zubrytska, 9
[30] Renan, 17.
[31] Joseph, 210
[32] Renan, 14
[33] Joseph, 118-119
[34] Blommaert and Verschueren 1992, 367

Ideological disputes often acclaim theories promoting a certain political advantage. Such theories frequently operate on the level of ephemeral abstraction. The traditional Russian perception about the 'deficiency' of the Ukrainian nation is supported by an application of a cluster of national features whose slots have been filled with a content suitable for the purpose. The Russian version of Ukrainian identity cluster reveals very little deviation from the Russian national cluster. Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians have a common descent—Kievan Rus. The migration within the Soviet Union and the policy of building the undivided nation of Soviet people strengthened commonalities among the Eastern Slavs. By and large, they share Orthodox Christianity and numerous historical records. The conspicuous traditional features which distinguish Ukraine from Russia are language, cultural symbols such as dances, folk clothing and music, and historical landmarks such as Zaporozhian Cossackdom and Ukrainian statehood in 1917-1918[35]. However, Russian intellectuals come up with arguments overthrowing these Ukrainian distinctions. Ukrainian has been presented as a dialect of Russian which is not a mother tongue to many Ukrainians anyway. This view was shared among many influential Russian thinkers such as the proletarian writer Maxim Gorky[36] and the dissident writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn[37]. According to Besemeres[38], " [f]ew Russians can accept the idea of Ukraine as a separate country". As for cultural symbols, the Russian stereotype casts them as a ploy of a radical group who try to de-stabilise Russia-Ukraine relations. The Ukrainian cultural icons are an everlasting subject of Russian ridicule. The British scholar and journalist Anna Reid reproduces the conventional Russian stereotype about Ukrainians:

> Russians regarded - and still regard - Ukrainians as really just a subspecies of Russian in the first place. Any differences that did demonstrably exist between them were the artificial work of perfidious, Popish Poles—replaced in today's imagination by the meddling West in general. Rather than attacking Ukrainians and Ukrainian-ness as inferior, therefore, Russians deny their existence. Ukrainians are a 'non-historical nation', the Ukrainian language a joke dialect, Ukraine itself an 'Atlantis' -- a legend dreamed up by Kiev intellectuals' in the

[35] Other common beliefs and landmarks of Ukrainian history can be found in A., Reid, *Borderland: A Journey through the History of Ukraine* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1997).
[36] Maxim Gorky called Ukrainian "a vernacular of Little Russians " and was reluctant to authorise translation of his novels into Ukrainian since Ukrainian was not a distinctive language for him.
[37] A., Solzhenitsyn, *Rossiya v Obvale [Russia in collapse]* (Moscow: Russkiy put', 1998).
[38] John, Besemeres, ' Ukraine: A sharp turn eastwards ?', *ANU Centre for European Studies Briefing Paper Series*, Vol. 1, No 1, 2011a, 1-24, here 15.

> words of a parliamentary deputy from Donetsk. The very closeness of Ukrainian and Russian culture, the very subtlety of the differences between them, is an irritation.[39]

Ukrainian ideologists in their attempt to refute the Russian imperial view, have been locked within the national cluster theory. Responding to Russian allegations they amplify the public exposure to national symbolic activities and buttress the monolingual cultural policy. '[A] signifying or symbol forming activity'[40] is indeed a necessary effort for national consolidation, as the nation 'depends upon continual acts of imagination for its existence'[41]. Ukrainian cultural symbols authenticate collective memories of the diverse Ukrainian population whose division, Russian intellectuals try to emphasise. The existence of the Ukrainian nation, like the Russian and many other nations, has been sustained by a sufficient legacy of group memories and the collective will to validate those memories. The nation is an 'interpretative community'[42] supported by 'shared memories...[and] shared forgettings, the putting aside of differences among groups constituting the nation, while also ceasing to remember that there was a time when they [South, East and West of Ukraine-L.A.] were not united as a nation.'[43] Ukrainian and Russian languages have been used as vehicles which have carried the Ukrainian legacy of memories even though there was a time when the two languages were no different[44]. This situation is not exceptional: many other nations use multilingual carriers of their cultural heritage[45]. The intensity of debates is a product of the perception that cultural boundaries between nations are to be solidly authenticated by the language in use.

5. The Russian stereotype about Ukraine in the international press

Many Westerners have also been exposed to the Russian view about the 'cultural poverty' of the Ukrainian nation since they used to receive all or most of the information about Ukraine from Russian sources[46]. For instance, Blommaert and Verschueren[47] used the following quotation

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[39] A., Reid, 65.
[40] Homi K. Bhabha. *The location of culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 211
[41] M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 70.
[42] See Hobsbawm; Anderson.
[43] Joseph, 114, see also Renan, 16-21.
[44] See Bernard Comrie and Greville G. Corbett (eds.) *The Slavonic languages* (London; New York : Routledge, 1993) on divergence of Russian and Ukrainian. Some Russian thinkers, e.g. Maxim Gorky, believe that Ukrainian is still a Russian dialect.
[45] See Renan, 16; Joseph, 167
[46] P.R., Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 11.
[47] Blommaert and Verschueren 1992, 359; 1998, 134 quote the *Guardian Weekly*, 4 November 1990, 9

from the *Guardian Weekly* to demonstrate a widespread stereotype of Ukrainian 'underdevelopment':

> The poor old Ukraine has had a bad press. Both the Poles, who dominated the towns of the Western part, and the Russians, who dominated those of the East and South, looked down on Ukrainians as peasants, speaking jargon. The language itself varied greatly from region to region—in the West quite close to Polish, in the east sometimes indistinguishable from Russian.[…] Politically, Ukraine was underdeveloped […].

The Belgian linguists' focus on the belief that 'the absence of a specific language as a distinctive feature immediately casts a shadow on a group's claims to nationhood'[48]. However, this example better illustrates deliberate attempts to mislead the public through misrepresentations depicting 'cultural poverty'. The report is no more than a re-phrasing of the traditional Russian jingoistic cliché discussed by Anna Reid. Significant efforts have been put into portraying Ukrainian as a dialect lacking a proper standardisation. The attempt can be a political strategy of ensuring that the Ukrainian case is commensurable with the stereotype of an underdeveloped nation. The low symbolic ranking of a dialect status vis-a-vis a fully-fledged language undermines Ukrainian chances for the national recognition. Contrary to the presented account, literary Ukrainian language[49] exists since the end of the 18th century[50] and it is understandable in all regions of Ukraine. It has its dialects like many other national languages. Ukrainian was formed and maintained despite prohibitions and discouragement by Russian officials in the long centuries of Russian dominance. A BBC report[51] reveals: 'The Ukrainian nation has been fighting for its native language for centuries. People have even died in the struggle to use the Ukrainian language'. This could suggest a similarity between Ukrainians and Basques though Blommaert and Verschueren contrasted their cultural history as contaminated and compromised versus uncontaminated and uncompromised. The gap between Russian and Ukrainian is as wide as between Spanish and Portuguese, Estonian and Finnish, Dutch and German.[52] The group of South Slavonic languages represents more challenges of demarcation between language and dialect[53]: the debates on differentiation of Macedonian from Bulgarian and Serbian from

[48] Blommaert and Verschueren 1998, 134
[49] See Comrie and Corbett.
[50] Ivan Kotlyarevsky's *Eneyida*, an epic poem and burlesque, is regarded to be the earliest literary work published in modern Ukrainian. *Eneyida* appeared in 1798.
[51] 'Ukraine divided over language row', BBC News, 22 April 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4472069.stm>, [accessed 20 December 2010]
[52] Reid, 85
[53] See Comrie and Corbett

Croatian[54] could be seen as more intense and controversial. It is also surprising that Ukraine became a model case of linguistic fragmentation. For instance, Norwegian linguistic controversy (see below) has not been paraded in Russian or European discourse or labelled as a sign of 'underdevelopment'. The Norwegian language exists in two official written forms -- Bokmal and Nynorsk. The standardisation of the both versions of Norwegian began later than for Ukrainian. The historical ties between Denmark, Sweden and Norway are similar to the relations between Russia, Poland and Ukraine discussed by Anna Reid above.

The Russian stereotype of Ukrainian cultural poverty sporadically emerges in a variety of places. For instance, a message from the Russian website *Odnoklassniki* has revealed the following: 'The ugly language of peasants [Ukrainian] should be abolished'[55]. Such sentiments contradict linguistic scholarship: 'we have no independent criteria by which to measure the quality of languages'.[56]

The report from the *Guardian* promotes the Russian view of unbreakable ties between Russia and Ukraine. It implies that the internal differences among Ukrainian ethnic communities are wider than the gap between the Russian and Ukrainian cultures. Given that Ukraine is politically 'underdeveloped' and does not have a history of statehood, it would not be able to govern a heterogeneous society. By contrast, Russia as a 'fully-fledged' nation, possesses a rich experience in running a state where group differences have been minimised. Hence, the traditional Russian mythology delegitimizing Ukrainian independence has spilled out into the Western press.

6. Views of Kremlin political analysts

Alexander Dugin, a right-wing Russian politician, Professor and Department Chair at Moscow State University[57] has further elaborated the traditional Russian myth about the non-existence of any Ukrainian nation[58]. The myth of a conspiracy against Russia among radical Ukrainians and the myth of the absurdity of their symbol-forming activity have enhanced the traditional representation of Ukrainian cultural poverty:

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[54] Blommaert and Vershueren 1992, 367

[55] From the website [odnoklassniki.ru], private correspondence.

[56] Joseph, 136.

[57] Umland and Shekhovtsov, 676 argue: 'His articles and books could be of intellectual interest only to those Russian readers who do not know foreign languages well enough to read, or do not care to get access to, the relevant European literature, or to those seeking ideological indulgence to feed their anti-Western—particularly anti-American—*ressentiment*. But Dugin's numerous publications and frequent TV appearances have become part and parcel of the daily political and intellectual life of contemporary Russia.'

[58] Compare the view of Vladimir Putin on Ukrainian statehood discussed in Besemeres 2010a, 15 and 22.

> **Dugin: …[**T]hey [Ukrainians] have no nationally specific differences: either noses, or a cuisine, except for *salo* [pig's fat/lard] and *seliodka* [herring].
>
> **Laertsky**: No, they have *papakha* [the Caucasian/Cossack fur hat] and *hopak* [a Ukrainian dance]. They also have a waistband which is called *kushak* [girdle].
>
> **Dugin**: That's what the best representatives of Little Russia[59] have. But the most terrible Little Russians do not differ from Great Russians. They do not have any national traits, either interior or exterior, but their spirit and their metaphysical status ensures that they are Little Russians indeed. They see Russia as a petty and vile country. They hate us and wish us ill. Those Little Russians are indeed the worst racial enemy of Great Russians[60].

Regrettably, the Professor of Moscow State University demonstrates a primitive folk perception in believing that the differences between nations should be manifest in their physical appearance.[61]

Another controversy has appeared in his claims: Ukrainians are not different from Russians but yet they are 'the worst racial enemy of Great Russians'. Dugin's theoretical misconceptions are grist to the mill of his argument.

Dugin formulates a conspiracy theory which casts 'conscious' Ukrainians as a radical group fighting against Russian political interests[62]. However, the threat emanates from a cultural community whose existence he vigorously denies. This topic has been elaborated in a discussion concerning the former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

> **Dugin**: I think that [Brezhnev] was a good man…It seems to me that nothing was bad about him.

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[59] Little Russia is the 19th century popular name for Ukraine. It is presently perceived as pejorative.

[60] A., Dugin, *Pop-Cul'tura i Znaki Vremeni* [Popular culture and tokens of the time] (St Peterburg: Amfora, 2005), 89.

[61] Joseph, 171 comments on the findings of German anthropologists and ethnographers of the Nazi period:

> They did not hide the negative results from the party and government officials who had set their research tasks, but informed them that no scientific criteria existed for physically distinguishing a Slav from a German, or indeed a Jew from a German.

[62] The theory of the national conspiracy is not new. In order to justify the Armenian genocide during the WW1 the Ottoman authorities launched a propaganda campaign presenting Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire as a security threat. See V.H Dadrian. *The history of the Armenian Genocide* (Providence, RI & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 220. Similarly, Stalin ordered deportation of various ethnic groups under the pretext of security threat.

> **Laertskiy:** I can't say anything negative about him. Indeed a most kind man he was…
>
> **Dugin**: Albeit he was linked to the Ukrainian mafia[63].
>
> **Laertskiy**: Well, the roots always come out[64]

This 'most kind man', Brezhnev, plotted against his alleged fellow-compatriot Khrushchev, orchestrated the invasion in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan and is infamous for his political legacy. However, according to Dugin, Brezhnev's only sin was revealing his Ukrainian connections. Ironically, Brezhnev with Ukrainian roots was the one who replaced the conspicuously Ukrainian Khrushchev.

If the dubious descent of the leaders of the former Russia-centred state does not cause any concern in relation to the Russian national identity cluster, the heterogeneity of Ukrainian society and the impure ethnic origin of their leaders is, to the contrary, another manifestation of Ukrainian underdevelopment for Russian intellectuals. The descent of Ukrainian leaders has been denounced by another political analyst- Mikhail Leontyev. On top of the traditional denial of the Ukrainian nationhood which peaked in an interview titled 'Ukraine, the country, does not exist '[65], Leontyev derides the notion of Ukrainian national interests as proclaimed by M. Yekhanurov, the former Prime Minister of Ukraine and Minister of Defence, who is of Buriatian descent (an ethnic group from Siberia).

> As for Byelorussia or Ukraine, they are simply a part of the same unified ethnic group. What sort of Ukrainian identity does the Buryat Yekhanurov (the former Defence Minister of Ukraine) have when he speaks about the Russian military threat? At which point in his life did he realize that a Kobza- player[66] was singing inside of his body?...[67]

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[63] According to some recently found Church records, Brezhnev was registered as Ukrainian in Church records though Reid, 205 suggests that Khrushchev and Brezhnev were both Russians from eastern Ukraine.

[64] Dugin, 88

[65] 'Net takoi strany—Ukraina' [Ukraine, the country, does not exist!] , Russian information agency *Rosbalt*, 19.1.2009, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/2009/01/19/537390.html>, [accessed 30.01.2011]. Vladimir Putin seems to have a similar view. As Putin is widely reported to have said to George W. Bush, 'You don't understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state'. See Besemeres 2010a, 15 and 22.

[66] Kobza is a Ukrainian musical instrument. The great Ukrainian National poet Taras Shevchenko is called Kobzar' which meant a Kobza player. Kobza becomes one of the Ukrainian cultural icons.

[67] '*Chya "krysha" krashe?* 'Whose 'cover-up' is better?', in *Argumenty i Fakty*, No 31, 2009, 5

As has been demonstrated in Sections 3 and 4, the descent feature in the national cluster provides guidance rather than a strict rule[68].

The derision of Ukrainian cultural symbols is a popular rhetorical device. Dugin ridicules s*alo* and *hopak,* whereas Leontyev mocks *kobza-player*. This rhetoric produces multiple pragmatic effects. First, the attacks on national symbols stir a strong public response[69]. Second, through exposing the Ukrainian 'addiction' to symbolic activity, the nation is portrayed as immature.

Despite the evident naiveté of many such claims, they fuel the traditional perception of Ukrainian cultural poverty and political immaturity. The tales of the criminal intentions of 'radical' Ukrainians, their excessive symbol-forming activity, and the questionable Ukrainian descent of the country's leaders stimulate this deeply rooted prejudice against Ukrainian patriotism by ethnic Russians, Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine and other nations of the former Soviet Union.

7. Views of the Russian opposition

The Russian opposition worries, by contrast, that Ukrainian nation-building efforts to resist Russian expansionism are insufficient. After the astonishing reversal of Ukrainian public opinion in the Presidential elections of 2010, Valeria Novodvorskaya gave an interview to the democratic media outlet 'Echo of Moscow' where she argued that the Yanukovych Presidency may lead to a national catastrophe and a loss of sovereignty.

> **O. Zhuravleva**: Do you think that Russia is going to subjugate Ukraine?
>
> **V. Novodvorskaya**: Russia is going for everything that is vulnerable. [...]Through brainwashing or sometimes with the help of tanks. We have just observed the war between Russia and Georgia. If Ukraine does not take measures, it will become a protectorate [...]. I can imagine what Yanukovych is going to do in the realm of linguistics. Legislation about a second state language is likely to be issued.
>
> **Zhuravleva**: What's wrong with that?
>
> **Novodvorskaya.** It is very wrong for a country which has problems with national identity. In particularly, because it has an insolent and aggressive neighbour such as the Russian Federation or the Soviet Union. In addition to it, the policy of russification was started at the time of Empress Catherine and

[68] Renan, 14
[69] Joseph, 93.

> hence, approximately 50%[70] of the population do not know and do not wish to know Ukrainian.
>
> **Zhuravleva:** Bilingualism is a logical solution then.
>
> **Novodvorskaya**: No, there is no logic in it. When the country is not tied together with language, history and a unified attitude to history it becomes an unstable hut lacking a proper foundation...It's a house built on sand. It's very bad. [...] Can you imagine a situation in Russia when 60 or 50 % of its present population do not know Russian ...and do not want to learn it.[71]

Given that Ukrainian political and cultural interests are considered as separate from Russian, this interview demonstrates a remarkable shift in the Russian perspective on Ukraine. Previously Russian democrats and oppositionists were reluctant to admit Ukrainian independence[72]. With the prospects of totalitarianism strengthening within Russia, surviving Russian liberals have been keen to show solidarity with other potential victims of Russian authoritarianism. Besemeres[73] corroborates accounts of the Russian neo-imperial aspirations:

> As President Yanukovych, much more pro-Russian than any of his post-1990 predecessors, strengthens his grip on Ukraine, the chances of Moscow gathering together most of the territory between itself and Poland in a Russian-led alliance of Soviet-nostalgic autocrats increase.

Hence, Russian economic pressure, control over the Ukrainian governing elite, increasing anti-Ukrainian propaganda within Ukraine, and incoherent beliefs among the Ukrainian population can indeed provoke a collapse or crisis of Ukrainian statehood. Novodvorskaya brings back the traditional argument on the importance of the national cluster of features (see Section 3 and 4). However, it should be noted that the nation is more than just a cluster of features. It is also a daily plebiscite. The imposition of Ukrainian language often leads to resentment among Russian-speaking Ukrainians. Strengthening state control over cultural preferences provokes a division among the population instead of the desired consolidation. The case of Alsace-Lorraine shows

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[70] The assessment is inaccurate. According to 2001 census, 67.5 % of the population declared Ukrainian as their native language and 29.6 % declared Russian. See "Linguistic composition of the population", *All-Ukrainian population census, 2001*, <http://web.archive.org/web/20080105092304/http:// www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/ eng/ results/general/language/>, [accessed 1.02.2011].

[71] 'Osoboe mnenie s Valeriey Novodvorskoi '[A special opinion with guest V. Novodvorskaia] on 11.02.2010, *Ekho Moskvy Programs*, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/655623-echo/> , [accessed 1.06.2010].

[72] Reid, 230 comments on the unwillingness of Russian politicians to recognise Ukraine as a separate political entity: 'Whether your name is Zhirinovsky, Yavlinsky or Gaidar, somewhere in your mind you think Ukraine is a fake, a phoney. '

[73] John Besemeres, 'Can Poland and Russia get along at last?', *Quadrant*, September 2010b, 50-57, here 56.

that the linguistic framing of nationhood is not always a successful strategy in claiming title to the disputed territory.

8. Ukrainian pro-Russian politicians

The Ukrainian Party of Regions together with the Communist Party advocate closer ties with Russia, express opposition to Western influence, and argue in favour of two official languages, Ukrainian and Russian. These parties address the pro-Russian voters of South and East Ukraine.[74] As has been demonstrated in Section 7, some Russian oppositionists link this position of the Communists and Regions with the ultimate demolition of the nation. Statements of Dmitry Tabachnik, present Minister of Ukrainian Education and Science, illuminate the humanitarian prospects for Ukraine envisaged by the ruling party[75].

> Who needs the Ukrainian language if it is dying? The state that claims to be democratic must not impose the interests of a minority[76] on its majority, even if this minority regards itself to be 'nationally-conscious' Ukrainians[77].

> A country which claims to be a modern civilised state should be ashamed of parading itself as a clown and of entertaining Western intellectuals with inflated patriotism and folk motifs in a political fashion[78].

The claim about 'the dying Ukrainian language' is an exaggeration aimed at appealing to Russian speakers. In other respects, his claims are redolent of Dugin's position: indications of a conspiracy theory[79] combined with attacks against banal nationalism. Similar to Dugin, his familiarisation with global nation-building processes is inadequate. Tabachnik seems to be unaware of the cultural practice of native language maintenance in 'civilised countries'[80]. He invokes anecdotal evidence borrowed from Russian ethnic humour for characterisation of Ukrainians. However, he is meant to be the educational leader of these 'despised' Ukrainians. Consider the following:

> The characteristic trait of the Ukrainian nation, which is still in formation, is a desire to play dirty tricks against her neighbour [Russia-L.A.], to betray the

[74] Strikha, 115- 116.
[75] M. Tabachnik holds the title of Professor in history though, according to Wikipedia his dissertations was not found in public libraries. Hence, the authenticity of his degrees has been questioned.
[76] Again, there is a misrepresentation of the diglossia Russian-Ukrainian. Compare with the data from 2001 census in note 63.
[77] Tabachnik, 127
[78] Ibid, 129
[79] Ibid, 15-17 on the reasons for Ukrainian independence.
[80] Joseph, 192 argues that in Ireland, 'attempts to save Gaelic deserve support'.

> neighbour and benefit from her deception; it's also consenting to the loss of one eye in exchange for punishing the neighbour with the loss of both eyes.[81]

Tabachnik's position advocates the re-union of Russian speaking regions of Ukraine with Russia. He calls this self-inflicted irredentism against his own country 'federalism'[82] and represents in his own person, a good argument for Novodvorskaya.

9. Views of nationally conscious Ukrainians

The position of nationally conscious Ukrainians cannot be analysed in isolation from the anti-Ukrainian sentiments of Russian neo-imperialists and local pro-Russian politicians. The Ukrainian patriots resist russification by acclamation of Ukrainian cultural heritage. The practical matters addressed by pro-Russian politicians such as habitual language and socio-economic connections within the territory of the former USSR, have been counterbalanced by care about intellectual needs of society and its spiritual wealth. Ukrainian cultural militants overplay the Ukrainian contribution to the world cultural heritage, repudiates links with the Russian culture, and justifies the radicalism of Ukrainian national policy through accounts of unique Ukrainian historical development.

Yekelchyk[83] in his analysis on textbooks of Ukrainian culture reveals:

> Some patriotic Ukrainian scholars cannot resist the temptation to claim that the ancient Slavs built Stonehenge, the prehistoric Trypillians... spoke Ukrainian and the famous Sumerian civilisation was also possibly Ukrainian.

Acclaim of unparalleled Ukrainian spirituality counterbalances the myth of cultural poverty:

> No poetry in the world, it seems, is as oriented towards the past as the poetry of Ukraine; no other poetry looks as intently to the past for justification and confirmation of its own and its people's right to exist[84].

It should be noted that no objective methodology exists for the accurate measurement of historical memories in poetry. The exclusivity of Ukrainian literary products has no better validation than the vilification of the Ukrainian language discussed in Section 5. Rhetoric of high

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[81] Tabachnik, 187
[82] Ibid, 145-160
[83] Yekelchyk , 30. See also Andrew Wilson, The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation [2000], 2nd edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
[84] Mykola Riabchuk, 'My pomrem ne v Parizhi', Introduction to Ihor Rymaruk (ed.), Visimdesiatnyky: *Antolohiia novoi ukrains'koi poezii* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1990), xviii, quoted from Zubrytska, 3.

moral standards is deployed to substantiate Ukraine's global standing:[85] 'We [Ukrainians] don't want to be treated by the EU or by the United States as inferiors; that is something we will not accept.'[86]

The repudiation of connections with Russian history and culture[87] peaks in the appeal to abandon the use of Russian language. The supremacy of Ukrainian ethnic development and the integration of minorities into mainstream Ukrainophone culture have been stressed:

> [T]he [Ukrainian] heterogeneous society has to become a modern political nation, while the Ukrainophone culture of ethnic Ukrainians has to transform itself into the shared culture of this ethnically diverse nation[88].

According to Blommaert and Verschueren[89], claims incorporating the recognition of cultural diversity often represent 'forms of oppression.. .supported by standard nationalist arguments associating national territory with the national language'. Ethnic groups other than the dominant culture often tend to interpret this policy as a deprivation of their rights. The justification of this policy invokes a linguistic argument on the functional sustainability of Ukrainian:

> [R]egular code switching hinders the development of the indigenous language, whereas each language can develop its polyfunctional potential only if members of the language community constantly do creative work in and on the language concerned[90].

The merits of this argument can be accepted on the level of a linguistic theory. Nevertheless, language maintenance is a social process which is adjusted to political, economic and psychological reality. The paramount importance of language preservation diminishes if other factors are to be considered. Debates about the spiritual well-being of the nation and the functional enrichment of Ukrainian language channelled public attention away from the predatory privatisation of state assets by shadowy tycoons in the first years of Ukrainian independence.[91] The fixation over the linguistic issue may undermine the wealth and the territoriality of the nation which is presently associated with this language. Even though the uniformity of Norwegian would secure 'realisation of its polyfunctional potential', the attempt to

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[85] Corsican cultural militants adhere to a similar rhetoric. See A. Jaffe ' Locating power: Corsican translators and their critics' in J.Blommaert *Language Ideological Debates* (Berlin:Mouton de Gruyter, 1999): 39-67
[86] Zubrytska, 7.
[87] See Yekelchyk.
[88] Blommaert and Verschueren 1992, 372
[89] Srikha, 105
[90] Zubrytska, 11
[91] Reid, 218-221

consolidate versions of Norwegian failed. The attempt to revive Irish Gaelic by making it a required school subject in the Republic of Ireland had the opposite effect, since the younger generation resents such cultural pressure[92].

The persistent references to being the youngest nation and state from both pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians and conscious Ukrainians demonstrates that the myth of the nation-state has never been properly questioned. Compare the following argument:

> I would like to mention the price of historical (in)justice. Unlike many European societies, Ukraine did not pass through a nation-state building stage in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century[93].

The fact that, for example, Slovenia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Slovak Republic[94] share Ukrainian 'pride' and 'historical (in)justice' has not been acknowledged in the discussion. Hardly any reference has been made to the fact that many nations[95] such as Scots, Catalans, Basques, Corsicans, Sardinians and others have not been successful in claiming their sovereign statehood. Some convenient historical examples have been considered but an understanding of the dynamic nature of nationhood has not eventuated from these debates[96]. National strength has been perceived by both Russians and Ukrainians as resulting from the historical experience of running a sovereign state, imposition of a uniform national language for all subjects of the state and the reduction of ethnic and ideological diversity. This ideal model of nationhood has been inferred from Russian self-perception and thus it inevitably reveals the 'shortcomings' of Ukrainian nationhood. Ukrainian accounts of Russian oppression have been provided to give reasons for alleged cultural 'underdevelopment'. In response, Kremlin political analysts generate new waves of Russian counter-propaganda.

10. Conclusions

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[92] Joseph, 80

[93] Zubrytska , 8; see also Tabachnik, 188 on 'the pride of being the youngest nation and state in the continent'.

[94] Slovenia proclaimed independence on June 25, 19991, Ukraine on August 24, 1991, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on September, 8, 1991 and Slovakia on January 1, 1993.

[95] The term 'nation' is used in line with numerous publications considering stateless nations. Some other scholars may adopt 'ethnic groups' or 'minorities' in this context.

[96] For instance, Catalonia was mentioned as a case of the distinguished linguistic recognition during and after the Olympic Games in Barcelona 1992 (Zubrytska, 11) but no parallel with the Ukrainian prominence due to its input into foundation of the United Nations has been envisaged. Blommaert and Verschueren 1992, 375 provide a conflicting account on the status of Catalan in Spain where 'language choice is highly symbolic and language shift is often motivated by the dynamics of social mobility'.

Two versions of homogeneity promoted for Ukrainians may target different political outcomes, derive from the same intellectual assumptions. On the one hand, the positioning of Ukraine in the Russian monolingual nexus serves the following purpose:

> The political goal becomes that of fixing boundaries to prevent them from moving again (unless it is to expand)...[I]t is necessary to convince those living on the frontiers of the nation, near the borders, that they are one people along with those in the centre.[97]

On the other hand, the Ukrainian monolingual option has a more complicated motivation. It copies the imperial policy, safe-guards against possible separatist movements and illuminates a reversal of the political power position. Blommaert and Verschueren[98] explain the radicalism of language policy among newly independent nations as an over-reaction to their own long-term oppression by the hegemonic nation:

> [T]he 'liberated' Moldavians and Kazakhs or Slovaks, as well as the liberated East-Germans, seem to be building a track record of oppression against minorities. Every minority has its own minorities. And for members of minority groups, be they immigrants in Western Europe, or Gagauz people in Moldova, the 'national' government may be as bad as the empire, because in both cases very little attention is given to their linguistic, cultural or whatever rights.....

The elimination of Russian is also an attempt to consolidate the nation and safeguard it from re-union with the former empire. Devil's advocates may argue that national consolidation can be better achieved through the guarantee of rights and choices that were disrespected in the unitarian state. The striving for the implementation of monolingualism is a product of political mythology and folk perception which casts nationhood as an enduring unitarian state securing the interests of the dominant cultural group and privileges for its 'superior' national heritage.

Pro-Russian ideologists deploy mythology glorifying the established nation-state, the pure descent of national leaders and the fixed differences among nations commonly manifest in the development of national languages and the physical appearance of the people. This mythology also foregrounds attributes of the so-called culturally (under)developed nation. The ethnic conspiracy theory and derision of the 'excessive' banal nationalism seek to enhance a perception of Ukrainian cultural poverty. Ukrainian *embroidered shirts*, *kobza*, *hopak, salo* and *kushak* are

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[97] Joseph, 105.
[98] Blommaert and Verschueren 1992, 373

not presented as counterparts of Russian *birch-trees*, *samovars*, *shchi* and *nested dolls*. An established nation often characterises the symbol-forming activities of other nations as dangerously emotional and ridiculous while any manifestation of its own nationalism, such as banknotes with portraits of public figures and national flags in front of houses are seen as manifesting an entirely proper social convention[99]. When the political myth of perpetual unity between Russians and Ukrainians fails to convert Ukrainians into another sub-species of Russian, an over-reaction to this conception from nationally conscious Ukrainians serves the Russian hegemonic purpose by causing discord among the Ukrainian population.

In return, Ukrainian cultural militants stress unique historical circumstances that allegedly led to shortcomings of the Ukrainian identity cluster. They assume the role of custodians of the fragile national heritage. The significance of Ukrainian intellectual products tends to be often overrated. The cultural policy of the nationally conscious Ukrainians has been designed to accommodate mythological features of an 'advanced culture' inferred from the Russian model. While pro-Russian ideologists have built solidarity with their purported audience by deriding irrational and criminal 'others', the nationally conscious Ukrainians alienate opponents of their 'cultural enrichment program' as philistine.

National ideologists are often tempted to construct a simplified and purist picture of the world defined by clear-cut boundaries and lacking fluidity and heterogeneity. Such a world-view inhibits the understanding of national identities as being a product of 'constant negotiations, dissonant exchanges, struggles and operations of power'[100]. Despite their academic credentials, post-Soviet intellectuals frequently embellish unsophisticated folk beliefs and illustrate their theories with convenient case studies. Above all, both sides of the political strife have disregarded the fact that the existence of a nation depends on a daily plebiscite, on the willingness of people to share the legacy of collective memories accommodating a flux of ethnic inputs and historical ambiguities.

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[99] Billig, 38
[100] Sanjay Sharma, *Multicultural encounters*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 33