

(RE-)INVENTING MULTICULTURALISM IN UKRAINE: MODELS, PRACTICES, AND DISCOURSES

Introduction

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The brutal full-scale war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine is not the best time for Ukrainians to reflect on the subject of multiculturalism. As more than once already in its history, the country is facing an existential challenge. The Russian aggression has spurred a powerful wave of national mobilization. Controversial, ambivalent, and until recently sluggish, Ukrainian nation-state building has crossed the red line beyond which it becomes irreversible. However, the logic of its development often clashes with the requirements and criteria of European integration.

The colorful Ukrainian political and cultural landscape has been repainted black and white by the war, at least for a while. The war does not leave much room and time for feeling out political alternatives and compromises. However, it cannot last forever. After the victory, Ukrainian society will once again be compelled to search for reconciliation of the needs of national consolidation with the diversity of a European borderland, inherited from history and geography.

The problem of Ukraine's cultural diversity has not gone anywhere and will never vanish from the agenda. It can and should be described from different perspectives and under different names. The term "multiculturalism" in this case is no worse than any other label. But the meaning attached to it is another matter. It is most often associated with ethnicity (Kulyk 2022) which is perhaps the main reason for questioning the suitability of the doctrine of multiculturalism for Ukraine (Kuzio 2005).

Skepticism about the prospects of ethnic multiculturalism in Ukrainian society comes not only from the specific nature of national development in Ukraine. It found a fertile ground in the public statements of the leaders of the major European countries—Great Britain, France, and Germany—who publicly admitted the failure of the policy of multiculturalism in their countries. Contrary to that, the idea of national statehood has proven its ability to resist the push of globalization and the "end of history". This applies even more to those peoples and countries whose national statehood is relatively new. Ukraine's western neighbors prove that joining the European Union or NATO does not erase either the regional or national specificity of the new members.

Russian influence may be considered the main distinguishing feature of Ukrainian recent history and geography. Russia remains the most powerful challenge to Ukrainian

nation-state building. The 2001 census counted more than 8 million Russians in Ukraine, which is 17 per cent of the country's population. Whatever the criteria for defining "Russianness", Russian identity remains a vague and poorly articulated category.

"Russianness" in Ukraine is not limited to language. It is closely intertwined with the Soviet and pan-Slavic legacies, not to mention the role of the Orthodox religion and imperial tradition. The war only accelerated the fragmentation and restructuring of the hybrid and overarching identities inherited from the past. But at the same time, the concept of "Ukrainianness" is changing as well. The nature and consequences of these changes will become clear only from a certain historical distance, depending on how the Russian-Ukrainian War ends.

All other ethnic minorities that call Ukraine home (Belarusians, Moldovans, Crimean Tatars, Bulgarians, Hungarians—we name only those that each accounted for no less than 0.6 per cent of the country's population in 2001) are the subject of close attention from both European institutions and the governments of neighboring countries. Ensuring the right of ethnic minorities to preserve and develop their culture is one of the requirements for Ukraine's membership in the European Union. However, it would be very naive to believe that this issue is free from nationalist and geopolitical overtones. The example of neighboring Hungary is not alone.

The idea of this collection of articles was conceived in the course of preparations for the 50th anniversary of the Canadian policy of multiculturalism in 2021. We planned to investigate to what extent the doctrine of multiculturalism lends itself to Ukraine's democratic transformation and how it is modified by the Ukrainian experience of nation-state building.

Both of these issues have long been in the focus of the scholars associated with Contemporary Ukraine Studies Program and the Kowalsky Program of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta. They were joined by researchers from V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, who back in 2018 had launched the interdisciplinary project "Practices of Self-Representation of Multinational Cities in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Age". The project soon received the name "CityFace", which metaphorically expressed its profile. The objective of the project was to explore the symbolic space of five Ukrainian cities (Dnipro, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, and Kharkiv), identifying the "face" of these cities and analyzing transformations of their residents' identity from the mid-nineteenth century until today (with an emphasis on the late Soviet era and present times). For three years, a group of more than sixty Ukrainian scholars studied a wide range of issues related to self-representation and socio-cultural hybridity of the city in comparative, regional, and national contexts. The project's organizers and participants were particularly interested in the issues of cultural continuity, historical heritage, and politics of memory.¹ The outcomes of research were presented in a collective monograph (Kravchenko & Posohov 2021).

The "CityFace" project laid the foundation for the next joint project of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, launched in

¹ For more on this, see: Posokhov 2022.

2021 under the name “The Cultural Mosaic of the City”.¹ It was aimed at rethinking the idea of multiculturalism in general and its applicability to Ukraine in particular. Considering the various meanings of multiculturalism (a manifestation of demographic diversity, a political philosophy of equality, a set of political and cultural practices, or a form of public discourse), the contributors to this volume planned to focus on the payoffs, potential, and difficulties of employing different models of multiculturalism from a European and global (comparative) perspective. The authors were guided by several questions: Are the idea and practice of multiculturalism compatible with the process of post-Soviet nation-state building? What principles should inform the policy of harmonization of ethnic and religious diversity? How can such factors of inequality as gender, race, class, and sexuality influence the policy of national identity?

The participants were expected to focus on the particularities of Ukrainian multiculturalism in its development during 1991–2022, as well as on the regional aspects of identity politics in Ukraine. This collaborative effort was supposed to contribute to the cultivation of tolerance and the search for consensus between representatives of different ethnic groups and subcultures in the country. With this in mind, the organizers planned to bring together scholarship and art as well as to compare expert opinions with views of ordinary people. The project was supposed to include various activities, including the publication of a collection of articles, an academic seminar, and the organization of an exhibition entitled “Colored Lenses: Life among Others” to be held in December 2021 at the Yermilov Center of Modern Art (Kharkiv). Some of the plans were carried through² despite the obstacles posed by the coronavirus pandemic; some were to be realized in 2022...

The war made significant adjustments to these designs. Some of the participants had to leave the project due to forced emigration. Others lost interest in the issue of multiculturalism, which took a backseat to more pressing subjects. Only a few authors eventually found the opportunity to put their research into a publishable form. The extent to which these publications reflect the current state of the arts in the field of multiculturalism studies in Ukraine is up to the reader to judge. Our task was to keep alive the scholarly interest in the problem that sooner or later will challenge the society striving for membership in the European community.

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¹ More information on both projects is available at: <https://cityface.org.ua>.

² The exhibition, for instance, was successfully put together, but its presentation took place online. See: <http://yermilovcentre.org/exhibitions>.

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