

The Condition of Contemporary Ukrainian Culture: The Postcolonial Retrospective and Perspective

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Contemporary Ukrainian culture is in a state of redefinition of the basic values and principles on which its functioning is based. The challenge faced by the political and intellectual elites of Ukraine is to create a common language code that will be accepted and understood by members of the whole society. The postcolonial character of culture in this context is the platform on which the contemporary image of the Ukrainian state is created. Therefore, the idea of contemporary Ukraine should be based on the process of getting rid of the “postcolonial syndrome” and shaping the Ukrainian culture based on the traditions and attitudes of national culture. The state’s position in this regard should be compatible and follow the common goal of real independence from the then colonizer. The Russian Federation, implementing its imperial policy towards Ukraine, effectively hinders the development of the Ukrainian cultural sphere, which is one of the priority state-building spaces. Therefore, Ukrainian society faces a very difficult task, because it should create an effective institutional and systemic base that will allow for nationwide development. The process of uniting the Ukrainian nation around the basic state-building idea should be based on a common language space, because language is the element that shapes the area of mutual social interactions. Ukraine in the conditions of competition, not only in the military context, but above all in the cultural context, should go in the direction of promoting its own position in every sphere of functioning, and especially in the cultural sphere.

Keywords: contemporary Ukrainian culture, postcolonialism, Ukraine, the state-building process, language code, imperial policy of Russia

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Introduction

Culture is a sphere in which, through appropriately selected cognitive and heuristic codes, is created an image of socio-political reality. The meaning of specific phenomena expressing the condition of the state and the nation is suitable. Contemporary Ukrainian culture, which takes its symbolic beginning from the moment when the Ukrainian state gained independence in 1991, is undergoing a process of deep transformation. This article is an attempt to analyze the state of the sphere of Ukrainian culture, playing a constructive role in the state-creating and national-forming process. It also presents the process of shaping the common language code as a factor integrating the cultural sphere, making it accessible to the whole society. The article based on the vision of Ukrainian cultural situation, described by Svitlana Balinchenko [Balinchenko, 2019], Oleg Bazaluk [Bazaluk & Blazhevych, 2016], Marcin Orzechowski [Orzechowski, 2018].

Implementing contemporary Ukrainian culture in the condition of postcolonial narrative, one should indicate the basic tendencies of its development. Culture is the platform for direct social interaction, where exchanges of different experiences and views on reality take place. This process can take place only when both sides of this interaction use a common language code. That is why it is so important to overcome barriers and shape mutual relations between the culture-creating sphere and its recipients. This phenomenon has an extremely complex structure and is a part of the common process of emerging post-colonial cultures around the world.

The general trend of the development of cultural postcolonial studies began in the 70s of the twentieth century. The subjects of interest of the researchers were the discourses by which Western colonizers and representatives of their cultures influenced the overseas colonies under their control. On the other hand, the ways of opposing this cultural domination were subject to examination. Postcolonial studies did not only deal with the relation between the center and the periphery in the western edition. They also constituted a general outline of the study of the colonial context, including also the then Soviet system [Pavlyshyn, 2014: 73-74]. The achievements of postcolonial studies are based primarily on the work of such researchers as Franc Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. The theoretical basis on which the considerations of these authors were based are, inter alia, the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida, the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, or the philosophical references to certain factions of Marxist ideology [Domańska, 2008: 157-159].

The complex structure of postcolonial studies has a direct implication in the form of difficulties resulting from defining the post-colonial concept itself, especially in the context of considerations regarding the condition of Ukrainian culture. The semantic scope of the concept in question in this case refers to the process of shaping Ukrainian culture as a separate phenomenon in relation to the Russian culture, which is a continuator of Soviet culture. Cultural diversity in this context should not consist in rivalry with the culture of the colonizer, but its essence should shape a completely new image that refers in its message to the new reality. Culture, which was imposed by the colonizing state, should be treated as an element of history and used as a sphere of inspiration for the creation of new artefacts [Pavlyshyn, 2014: 75]. The role of education at the processes of overcoming of postcolonial challenges and hybrid war ones are reviewed at the researches of Oleg Bazaluk [Bazaluk et al., 2018], Olga Kyvliuk [Kyvliuk et al., 2018], Liudmyla Savenkova [Savenkova & Svyrydenko, 2018], Dariusz Tulowiecki [Svyrydenko & Tulowiecki, 2018].

In turn, in the nomenclature of the subject there is also the term cultural anticolonialism, which refers to the process of creating cultural artefacts, developmental concepts, ideological postulates in order to establish a counterbalance to the culture imposed by the colonizer. The postcolonial perspective, analyzing the situation in the Ukrainian state, is more appropriate because the Soviet past is inevitable and constitutes a space to which Ukrainian culture will refer and establish itself in order to show the process of its development. If the creators of Ukrainian culture want to create new artefacts, they should also indicate what is this novelty.

Postcolonialism in this conceptual area includes not only the formation of a new cultural space, but also brings a certain time census. It refers to the treatment of contemporary Ukrainian culture as a culture that began to take shape after 1991. Nevertheless, the independent Ukrainian state has since survived several events that undoubtedly took its toll in the history of its statehood and influenced the change of social and cultural development vectors. Therefore, in adopting such a theoretical perspective, it is worth considering in the further part of the article how contemporary Ukrainian culture looks in the context of this social transformation.

The Peculiarities of the Dependence of the Ukrainian Socio-cultural Sphere from the Russian Influences

An outstanding Ukrainian linguist and literary critic Yuri Shevelov in his essay “Moscow. Marosieyka” (published in 1954) indicated that the biggest problems of Ukraine are Moscow, “*kochubeystvo*” and “*hutorianstvo*” [Shevelov, 2012]. There is an inseparable connection between these three phenomena. Generally, Moscow is a constructive element in this system that groups together the other two. Syndrome of “*kochubeystvo*”, in turn, relies on the complexity of the Ukrainian political, military and culture elite in solving intra-state problems. In this context, Moscow becomes an entity that is “invited” to the decision-making process. This is a direct reference to the Perejaslavská Settlement between the Ukrainian Cossacks and Tsarist Russia in 1654. The particular interests of the Cossacks’ leadership, which could not cope with the problem of the division of influence in the Ukrainian lands, contributed to the ongoing — obviously somewhat altered — involvement of Russia into Ukrainian affairs. The third of the aforementioned problems of Ukraine is “*hutorianstvo*”. It depends on the sense of inferiority and mediocrity of the Ukrainian nation in relation to others, especially considering the postcolonial context or defining it differently – post-Soviet – to the Russian people [Shevelov, 2012: 12-23].

Despite the passage of several decades, the factors indicated by Yuri Shevelov are still valid and constitute a point of reference for the discussion on the condition of the modern Ukrainian state. They also constitute the platform of the postcolonial imperative to which modern Ukraine is subject. While discussing the postcolonial character of the Ukrainian state, its fundamental two aspects are worth pointing out. First of all, the prefix post, meaning a chronological sequence in the context of Ukraine, does not mean a definitively completed transition from one form of state to another. Secondly, in the case of Ukraine, we should be talking generally about the ongoing and still unfinished process of transition. The discourse on the existence of a sovereign Ukrainian state/nation is a platform for discussions of contemporary Ukrainian political and intellectual elites. In particular, it boils down to the aspect of national culture discussed in this article and its post-colonial character.

Volodymyr Gorbunin, director of the National Institute for Strategic Research, stated that Russian cultural policy towards Ukraine was completely integrated with the general strategy

of liquidation of Ukrainian statehood. The spread of Russian propaganda was often used not only by mass media, but also by the culture and entertainment industry. The Russian cultural expansion against Ukraine was carried out consciously and consistently throughout all the years of independence, which was supported by ineffective state socio-cultural policy [Gorbulin, et al., 2017]. The statement by Volodymyr Gorbulin is an exemplification of the conditions in which contemporary Ukrainian culture is shaped. On the one hand, its post-colonial character, consisting in the creation of new artefacts based on the Soviet institutional and systemic tradition; on the other hand, culture is the plane on which the ideological struggle takes place supported by the idea of modern Russian imperialism.

In 1988, Ivan Dziuba — one of the leading Ukrainian intellectuals — published the article “Do we see Ukrainian culture as a comprehensive one?” pointing to the lack of fullness of Ukrainian culture. He also referred to the fact that its structural incompleteness and dysfunctionality are the reflection of colonial status and the result of a repressive imperial policy whose main goal was assimilation and subordination of Ukrainian culture through the use of institutional and discursive means [Dziuba, 1988: 312-315]. The implication of the theorems presented by Ivan Dziuba is a reference to the theoretical foundations centred around Antoni Gramsci’s reflections on cultural hegemony. Russia’s policy towards the Ukrainian state was an exemplification of the claims of this Italian Marxist. It came down to the conclusion that gaining power and maintaining it is based on domination in the sphere of culture [Wróblewski, 2016: 121-126]. That is why the discussion about the condition of Ukrainian national culture is so important in the context of contemporary Ukraine.

The imperial policy of the Russian Federation, based on symbolic violence, which dates back to the times of the Soviet era, shaped the tendency of cultural anticolonialism mentioned in this article. In the early 1990s, when Ukraine entered the path of building its own statehood, anticolonialism needed institutional and systemic base, manifested in the existence of Ukrainian schools, in effective language policy, increased circulation of printed literature in Ukrainian, shaping of Ukrainian information policy based on creating Ukrainian-language mass media and other activities aimed at strengthening the position of “Ukrainian” in public space [Kidruk, 2015: 91-94]. Ukrainian anticolonialism has opposed the Soviet ideology built for decades, and after 1991, the Russian ideology, its own idea of Ukrainian statehood. The symbolic dimension was to present strictly the Ukrainian ethos as the basis for the formation of the Ukrainian nation. The attitude of the political elite at that time, which depended largely on the condition of the state, was characterized by weakness and a sense of “Shevelov’s *kochubeystvo*”. The inadequacy of the deeds and the particular interests of the Ukrainian authorities in the first years after regaining independence contributed to drawing Ukraine into the sphere of influence of its then colonizer. The aspect of subordination to the interests of another state created an image of “seeming independence” [Możliński, 2016: 137-139].

Anticolonialism is a more radical form of changing reality than postcolonialism. In a situation when the colonizing policy of Russia was aimed at blurring the memory of the Ukrainian cultural uprisings, such as the Ukrainian revival shot, that is a mass murder of representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, in October 1937 in the Sandarmoch region in the forest near the town of Medvezhiegorsk in the Republic of Karelia — Mykola Kulish, Mykola Zerow, Les Kurbas, Marko Woronnyj, Valerian Pidmohylnyj — these are just some of the names of the representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, who were the resistance of Ukrainianness at the beginning of the 20th century, shot by the Soviet authorities, or the memory of the dissident movement “shistydyiatnykiv”, representatives of which joined the

group of prominent figures of the Ukrainian culture — Lina Kostenko, Ivan Dracz, Mykola Wıngranovsky or Vasyl Symonenko — anticolonialism tried to restore the memory of these events and people and report it to the largest possible number of recipients [Grabowski, 2012: 28-30]. In the context of the emerging Ukrainian state in the first decade of his independence, his return to cultural roots could have contributed to the intensification of the nation-forming and state-building process.

Postcolonialism, in turn, is less reactionary, but to a much greater degree creative and original. Postcolonial culture uses the experience of colonialism to shape its own, different, new consciousness. The idea of postcolonialism is based on the assumption that anti-colonialism repeats “a mirror reflection” of the colonial structure, thus preserving the essence of colonialism. Enriched with poststructuralist, deconstructivity scepticism, postcolonialism contains a relative understanding of the concept of colonialism and its denial and creates the possibility of using it in the political and cultural spheres. In politics, postcolonialism allows pragmatic definition of tasks and its non-ideological implementation, while in culture it contributes to the use of colonial myths and ideas for shaping new cultural artefacts [Pavlyshyn, 1994: 67-68].

The implication of the above considerations is the claim that contemporary Ukrainian culture, referring to the colonial past, creates a new space, a new cultural quality. The postcolonial character of culture is first of all a relative reference that contributes to a better understanding of reality.

The Idea of a Common Language Code as the Basis for the Existence of Ukrainian Cultural Space

Recalling again the work of Yuri Shevelov or Ivan Dziuba, taking into account the considerations of contemporary Ukrainian intellectuals (Oksana Zabuzhko, Mykola Ryabchuk and others), it should be said that the Ukrainian culture in terms of social status has not become the culture of a sovereign nation for years of state independence. A culture that covers the whole of society and is based on cultural codes that are understandable for the majority, which is not only communicative but, above all, constructive, basis is the Ukrainian language. It results from the fact that the full functioning of culture depends on the full functioning of the language at all levels of social interaction, formal and informal [Ryabchuk, 2015: 88-91]. In a situation when we talk about culture, language is the element that is present in both popular culture and “high” culture, therefore it should be a binder that unites the Ukrainian society. Despite the outlined perspective, in the popular culture as well as the “high” culture, different language codes are utilized. The discourse, which is presented to the majority of the society in the Ukrainian state, is based on a postcolonial narrative, which is absorbed by the nation without any reflections. On the other hand, Ukrainian “high” culture functions as a separate discourse that reaches a very small group of recipients because of heuristic and axiological limitations. In this context, the problem lies in the lack of communication and the lack of the factor connecting these two discourses. An imaginary buffer line has been formed that divides the intra-state process of shaping a common culture.

Wissarion Belinsky, in his works broadly discussing the question of Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation, indicated that the postcolonial character of the Ukrainian state, together with all its socio-political and cultural connotations, is the result of a specific Russification policy led by the tsarist and then Soviet administration in the occupied territories [Belinsky, 1954: 175-

177]. A completely different policy was carried out in Galicia by the Austrian governments, which posed obstacles to the process of shaping Ukrainian culture. That is why today, while walking the streets of Lviv or Ivano-Frankivsk, we will mostly not hear the Russian language, as it is, for example, in Kiev or Odessa. Nevertheless, this situation is not straightforward, because in most Ukrainian cities, where Lviv and other cities in Western Ukraine are not an exception, you can hear Russian language and meet Russian culture. This phenomenon has shaped a euphemistic image that has been defined as “the paradox of Bilozir”. It involves an intra-social confrontation referring to language and cultural issues.

The postcolonial character of Ukrainian culture is in fact connected with deep, structural deformations of society, which are the result of prolonged staying under the dominance of Russian culture. Contemporary culture in the Ukrainian state has lost to symbolic capital, which was possessed by Russian culture. It was both quantitative and qualitative, manifesting itself at the functional and institutional level [Bourdieu, 1986: 245-247].

Russian culture, and with it Russian language, creating a symbolic sphere separate from the Ukrainian one, dominated the cultural space in Ukraine. In the situation of using the same language (Russian), listening to the same music (Russian and Russian), watching entertainment programs and series in Russian and Russian realities, films referring to the Soviet common past and other activities aimed at incorporating Russian cultural codes into The sphere of Ukrainian culture shaped the situation in which the Ukrainian recipient was immersed in the Russian context as his own, which made him feel attached to the “imagined community.” In accordance with the Russian idea of imperial policy, which, as it can be seen, was also manifested in the cultural sphere, there was a gradual erosion of Ukrainian national and cultural identity, resulting in the re-colonization of the Ukrainian state [Gergało-Dąbek, 2017: 100-101]. In this context, Larysa Masenko pointed out that the country in which the language and culture of the former colonizer prevails will not develop as an independent country, but as a postcolonial country [Masenko, 2012: 13-14]. Therefore, it is worth realizing that the development of the linguistic and cultural sphere should become a priority task of the Ukrainian political and cultural elites. Ukraine as a postcolonial country is not in a lost position, because it has negative experience from the past, which it will try to avoid in the future.

The situation in the cultural sphere, which is currently shaped in the Ukrainian state, is based on the process of decoding cultural messages, making them widely available, in such a way that all social strata have the opportunity to participate in the formation of a state based on its own national culture. Creating a common space for social interaction today is an essential task of Ukrainian society. Language in this context is the element that should connect all Ukrainians around the national idea.

Nowadays, in the cultural environment in Ukraine, which shapes the plane of development and “introduces” Ukrainian to society, created a very ambiguous situation. One of the prominent Ukrainian writers of the “young generation” Serhiy Zhadan pointed out that in the process of creating national literature, and thus one can presume culture as well as the identity of the nation, the linguistic aspect is one of the priority and one of the most controversial. This is particularly visible in a country like Ukraine, where literature is created in two languages. In connection with this literature, which is created in the Ukraine in the Russian language it is automatically classified as a Russian cultural sphere present in the Ukrainian State and the assumption that these texts are part of Ukrainian culture, in most cases is unacceptable. Serhiy Zhadan lamented that if writers who live in the same country, in the same city, print their works in the same publishing houses are unable to cope with “language barriers”, then in the context

of society this problem has definitely stronger connotations [Zhadan et al., 2013]. Under the conditions of the Ukrainian state, the linguistic aspect is decidedly polite. This is due to the fact that often the choice of language is a question of worldview and ideological nature — in most cases, people choose not only language as a means of communication, and with language accept a certain sphere of values that combines political, cultural and religious aspects. This tendency is less clearly outlined in western Ukraine, while in the east the use of the Ukrainian language is associated with the adoption of a specific attitude, not always accepted by the rest of society.

Conclusions

From the above considerations depicting the state of Ukrainian postcolonial culture, there is a certain development tendency. The full functioning of Ukrainian culture is impossible without political and social changes of a comprehensive nature. Nowadays, the Ukrainian intellectual elite should try to create a common ground for interaction with Ukrainian society, transferring their message to an open space based on a common and understandable language code. On this ground, has been formed a whole galaxy of prominent young artists of Ukrainian culture — writers, directors and actors. Serhiy Zhadan, Max Kidruk, and Andriy Lyubka — these are just some of the names on the list of the contemporary young generation of Ukrainian writers who create their message based on the common language code discussed in this article. Artem Chapay, also one of the prominent creators of Ukrainian culture, in his book *The Ukraine* describes the Ukrainian state in terms understandable for everyone who will take this book in his hand [Chapay, 2018: 226]. Reality becomes clear and understandable for the majority of society. On the basis of the common language code, the nation begins to unite and understand that the artificially introduced social division is only a tool for external players who see their own interests in this implementation.

The development of the theatrical sphere is an exemplification of the tendency directed at shaping the common space of social communication. Today in the Ukrainian state more and more often, you can perceive a critical theatre, or a post-play theatre. It involves the feedback of the audience immediately after the performance. The current social problems conveyed by the actors of this theatre, delivered to the recipients by means of an intelligible language, create a space for mutual discussion on the presented problems. In this aspect, the postcolonial character of culture is often manifested, which is understood as creating something new based on the old. During the performances, political, social, economic and military problems are taken into account. They constitute a cross-section of those events, which Ukrainian society has to cope with every day.

It is important that this communication on the line between society and culture-power should not be destroyed under the influence of external stimuli. That is why it is highly expected to cultivate the achievements of culture, making it possible for them to access the whole society through effective introduction of a common language code, which will be accepted by all recipients. Language code, which will also be based on the values and traditions of the Ukrainian state.

The postcolonial character of the Ukrainian state, as it was mentioned at the beginning of this work, is a process that is heading in a certain direction. The basic task of the Ukrainian political and cultural elite is to jointly designate vectors that will lead the Ukrainian state out of the remains of the colonial syndrome. The aim is to get rid of the sense of inferiority and to

break the “internal” colonialism of thinking in terms of belonging to the Russian culture (along with the Russian language). The primary task of the whole Ukrainian society is the formation of their own cultural sphere along with its linguistic aspects.

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