



UKRAINIAN NATIONALISM: A POST-COLONIAL READING OF A NATION FINDING ITS FEET

UKRAYNA MİLLİYETÇİLİĞİ: KİMLİĞİNİ ARAYAN BİR ULUSUN POST- KOLONYALİZM ÜZERİNDEN OKUNMASI

Abstract

Post-colonial studies often begin with the questions of where and when does post-colonialism begin? With numerous imperialist narratives still haunting different parts of the world, it really becomes difficult to answer these questions. However, recent developments have reflected once again the continuing nature of colonialism via a shape-shifting practice. The current war between Russia and Ukraine has become an important experience in understanding this trauma. The aim of this study is to understand how the conflict, now a war, has started solidifying the Ukrainian identity via fetching its Other, namely Russia. The study inquiries into a post-colonial reading to understand recent Ukrainian national re-construction via history, territory, and culture. This begs an inquiry into the post-Soviet geography to better understand the re-positioning of Ukraine as a nation unfettered by the Russian Federation. This paper attempts to understand whether the recent war has launched a postcolonial resistance of Ukraine to assert itself via raising consciousness and to transform itself from a pseudo-nation-state to an authentic one.

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Öz

Post-kolonyal çalışmalar incelendiğinde genellikle post-kolonyalizm'in nerede ve ne zaman başladığı sorusuyla yola çıkıldığı görülmektedir. Dünyanın farklı yerlerinde hâlâ tanık olunan çok sayıda emperyalist anlatı varken, yukarıda bahsedilen soruyu yanıtlamak gerçekten zorlaşmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, son gelişmeler, bir biçim değiştirme pratiği aracılığıyla sömürgeciliğin devam eden doğasını bir kez daha yansıtmaktadır. Rusya ve Ukrayna arasındaki savaş, bu travmayı anlamada önemli bir deneyim haline gelmektedir. Ukrayna ve Rusya arasındaki savaşın bir boyutu ile kimlik çatışması olduğu görülmektedir. Savaşın seyri ile Ukrayna ulusal kimliğinin, Rus kimliğine karşı bir Öteki olarak nasıl konumlanacağı önemli bir sorun olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışma, tarih, toprak ve kültür kavramları ile Ukrayna'nın son zamanlardaki ulusu yeniden inşasını anlamak için post-kolonyal bir okuma üzerinden ele almaktadır. Bu durum Ukrayna'nın Rusya Federasyonu tarafından tahakküm edilen bir ulus olarak yeniden konumlandırılmasını daha iyi anlamak üzere Sovyet sonrası coğrafyaya yönelik bir sorgulamadır. Bu makale, son savaşın, Ukrayna'nın ulusal bilincini artırarak kendini savunmak ve kendisini sahte bir ulus-devletten otantik bir devlete dönüştürmek için sömürge sonrası bir direniş başlatıp başlatmadığını anlamaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Post-kolonyalizm, Milliyetçilik, Kimlik, Madun, Ukrayna.

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You find yourself a refugee;
you wake up one morning from troubled
dreams to discover that your world has been transformed.
Under cover of night, you have been transported elsewhere ... (Young, 2003:9).

Introduction

History does repeat itself and, the above quote explains quite a bit of the general thought on the issue of displacement, whether this be the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the recent annexation of Crimea by Russian Federation, or the recent war between Ukraine and Russia which all pertain to identity. Although International Relations¹ (IR) has not focused heavily on postcolonial studies, I find it a valuable inquiry to understand the concept of power – a sine quo non for IR – alongside its relationship with identity² re-construction as well as de-construction. Examining once again the Marxist analysis of “oppressor and oppressed nations,” it is still important to understand why Marx himself argued that “a nation that oppresses another cannot really claim to be free” (San Juan, 2007:112). This is an important statement to understand the relation between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. A great number of scholars have researched into this field, currently known as postcolonial reading. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) introduced the concept of “de-territorialization” at the heart of this debate, and this concept indicates the violent acts of both the colonial and imperial past which has transformed the cultural, linguistic, and social fabric of many today’s nations. For Derrida it is “difference,” which he explains as “distinction, inequality, or discernibility” where “to differ” projects “a nonidentity” (p. 278). And Bhabha has put forth “in-betweenness” (1994), in which he questions how subjects are formed ‘in-between,’ or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference” (p. 2) and moves on to describe post-colonialism as the “evolution of strategies of resistance” (p. 6). However, this alteration still begs for many additional investigations, and much focus is needed on the second world.³ A recent one is the ongoing war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Bearing in mind its Tsarist past, later followed by the Soviet experience, and recently Russian dominance, Ukraine is still a clear arena of ethnic fragments full of confrontations as well as contestations. It is difficult to understand as one colonizing and one colonized within this equation, but the existence of what Spivak (1990) called “native informant” as a postcolonial subject is still physical and continuous around the post-Soviet geography, thanks to the power of Russian language and culture. However, for the sake of a postcolonial national order, ethnic tensions are rising in Ukraine over the question of to what extent such claims are made to legitimately strengthen their positions. On the one hand, we witness the assertive Russian policy toward Ukraine from the very beginning of Ukraine’s independence (and even before) till recently, intervening in Ukrainian politics, and even attempting to replace governments (with those not ignoring Russian interests); on the other hand, Ukraine is experimenting with new ways of attachment and shuttling between the east and west. Recently this shuttling of the nation between the east and west has led to a war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. This study aims to understand how this war will impact the Ukrainian identity in finding itself, as well as positioning itself against the *Other* without the interventions of its past. Today’s Ukraine is still haunted by the old-fashioned concepts of “brotherhood of nations,” “country cousins,” “sibling unity,” “peripheral state,” “Little Russia,” etc., which highlight the subordinate position of Ukrainian identity. To understand these assumptions, there is a need of a postcolonial reading of today’s Ukraine via “true political independence, authentic sovereignty, and real self-determination [that] have now either been brought into existence or are, finally, even possibilities at all...” (Szeman, 2003:2). This means the asymmetrical relationship between the Russian Federation and the counties previously attached to it, which requires a deep reinterpretation. A reconsideration of the relations between Russia and its previously constitutive parts needs an in-depth analysis from many angles. This paper aims to understand the background of this land-grabbing by Russia, and more importantly in what manner Ukraine is responding to it. The former argues that every move made is for protecting the kinship, while the latter reasons it as a direct

intervention for its very survival. Viewed from both sides, the issue correlates on discourse, and discourse here is built on a common denominator shared by these countries, namely language. Speaking on language Morris (2010) argued that “the issue of language not only in the grammatical sense but in the sense of having a voice that can access power” (p. 4) remains important. This bears a re-reading of Ukraine – an unnamed colony – seeking its identity in a postcolonial era.

1. Understanding Nationalism via Post-colonialism

McClintock is right to argue that “the term [post-colonialism] also privileges the 19th century European colonial experience as the standard – an essentialism of colonialism that ignores, or at least diminishes, the imperial projects (in our case Soviet imperialism) both preceding the European Era and in the Era after its demise” (1992:86). In our case, it is the Russian imperialism which has re-created both the political and cultural geographies around its adjacent regions. That is why post-colonialism here is understood as a “fluid, catch-all counter hegemonic means of reaffirming identity over and against essentializing discourses of ethnicity or nationalism” (Syrotinski, 2007:27). To inquire into this argument, one must dive deep into postcolonial theory, which is fed by post-modern and post-structural literature, opening a new problem, revealed as the *subaltern*.

[...today, ‘capitalism crosses the entire network of natural, social, sexual and cultural forces, all languages and codes’. Contemporary capitalism is not simply the circulation of money and commodities, but rather infests every aspect of experience. When one desires or purchases a commodity, one is not simply buying the object itself, but also the signs, images and identities that go along with it (Baudrillard, 1975:138).

Post-colonialism clearly has become important in understanding how the imperial narratives and the design have set forth to interpret power, hierarchy, and domination (Chowdhry & Nair, 2004:11-12). That is why it has appeared as “a redemptive power of an idea” (Conrad, 2005) as well as a debate, or for some a discourse encountering the imperial. As Conrad puts it “You remember always that I am a Slav (it’s your *idée fixe*), but you seem to forget I am a Pole.” (1988:492) This is a clear sign of dual allegiance, recently witnessed in the Ukrainian case. The importance of postcolonialism is that it “disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures. Its radical agenda is to demand equality and well-being for all human beings on this earth” (Young, 2003:7). This confrontation in the case of Ukraine is formerly known as “Muscovite oppression” (Najder, 1984), “Sovietization” (Rubavicius, 2006), and finally “Russification” (Kelertas, 2006). Ukraine was never able to mature into a full-fledged nation-state, since certain outside interventions have possessed a significant amount of its identity. A continuously shapeshifting dynamic is confronting and blocking Ukrainian identity. On the other hand, Ukraine is struggling to generate, or recently to re-generate, its national identity, clearly not just against the phantoms addressed above, but also against the west. The importance of discourse comes into play as an important aspect of construction and re-construction of identities. And ‘knowledge’ alongside its carrier ‘the language’ comes into play with utmost importance; this is always about interest and power. Spivak (1988) asserted, “Knowledge is also a commodity which is exported, and as a result the subaltern becomes dependent on western knowledge, intellectuals, politics, rather than being allowed to speak for themselves” (p. 277-8). Spivak (1988) used the concept “epistemic violence” (p. 280), which summarizes the tone of the west via “thought, speech and writing” disseminating an act of violence, yet not a physical one, but more what is called “colonizing the minds” (p. 280). Russian discourse usually mentions the past, or at least refers to its close sphere of influence: that Moscow has had and will continue to have responsibility on issues pertaining to post-Soviet settlement, and even goes further in referring to post-Soviet geography. Recent examples are the annexation of Crimea, as President Putin has declared, “In people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice

and was passed from generation to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes our country went through during the entire 20th century” (Address by President Putin, March 18, 2014). This kind of discourse first disempowers Ukraine and places it into a subordinate position. Starting with the annexation of Crimea, later followed by the invasion of Donetsk and Luhansk, and recently transforming into a total war, the struggle has now spread to every domain, becoming an issue of survival thanks to the nature of war, as Tilly (1975) and Howard (1992) indicated that war and the military are major elements in the shaping of nation-states, which results in leaving the ground for nationalism. Spivak in her famous essay ‘Can the subaltern speak’ said the, “subaltern is always spoken for by those in positions of power, and are never able to represent themselves; further, if they speak, they are not heard” (1988:308). Spivak emphasized that “nationalism, like culture, is a moving base of differences, as dangerous as it is powerful, always ahead or deferred by definitions, pro or contra, upon which it relies” (1999:363).

For Spivak the debate circled around her invention of the concept of “native informant,” which she introduced as the post-colonial subject. And for Spivak the problem stems from how this “third-world subject is represented within western discourse” (1988:271). She analyzed the “native informant” through “politics of oppressed” (1988:292) in which she explored the question of “how to keep the ethnocentric Subject from establishing itself by selectively defining an Other” (1988:292)—in our case, how to re-position Russian identity as an *Other*. It is clearly the colonizing discourse, which for Spivak is a constant re-production of western hegemonic power over the third world. Although drawing on the same we vs. them binary, the colonizer first “speaks for as in politics” and “speaks about as in art and philosophy” (Spivak, 1988:275), where the colonized is and must remain silent. During the Soviet era, Moscow did pursue a type of internal colonization, where different ethnic and cultural backgrounds were ignored for the sake of creating the *homo Sovieticus* with the aim of “nationalist in form, socialist in content.” (Moore, 2006:27) A wave of assimilation was pursued by Moscow in holding together a great sum of diversity to create a supra-identity. And this was pursued by weaponizing the Russian language, constructing, and exporting knowledge via the Russian language to fulfill the interests of Russia. As Spivak handles knowledge as a commodity, the discourse produced is built on this constructed knowledge of Russia in an asymmetrical positioning, where Russian identity is always visible; however, Ukrainian identity is mostly invisible, unseen, and unapparent. This use of knowledge was pursued by Russia in the post-Soviet era as well, leading to many other problems. Spivak argued that “one of the guiding principles of geography – nation – [is] inextricably tangled with the mysterious phenomena of language...” (1999:279-80), emphasizing the importance of language and the way it is used to push down others in a systematic way. The Russian sphere of influence is large in the geographical sense; however, linguistically it is even larger. The use of the Russian language by millions gives it a multiplier effect. Since Spivak emphasizes “Identity or kinship, without direct involvement in the utilization of that other difference, between the colonizer and the colonized, is the nascent discourse of comparative philology.” (1999:8).

Spivak, with reference to Kant, emphasized “producing a counternarrative that will make visible the foreclosure of the subject whose lack of access to the position of narrator is the condition of possibility of the consolidation of Kant’s position” (1999:9). Here Spivak argued that the colonizer projects as well as imposes ethnocentric mythologies on the subaltern. The *Orientalist* binary is an imposition on the subaltern, since making a distinction subordinates the oppressed in the first place, such as the distinction between historical and non-historical, superior and inferior, complete and incomplete, are all coding of the consciousness of the subaltern. The case with regard to Ukraine is that the Russian Federation constantly emphasizes the kinship it shares with Ukraine and has the right to protect it at all costs, Snyder (2018) called this “politics of eternity.” So how will a postcolonial State – namely *Ukraine* – respond to such a direct challenge?

2. Ukrainian Nationalism: ‘Re-nationalization’ or ‘De-nationalization’?

The increase in tensions between Ukraine and the Russian Federation dates to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As a result of the dissolution, many Russian settlers in different Soviet republics found themselves becoming ethnic minorities in independent states. Different attachments to the Russian Federation led to a high degree of Russian interest and responsibility toward these groups, whether they were ethnically Russian, Russian citizens or just Russophiles. Alongside other interests, in the name of protecting these people, Russia has attempted to intervene in countries (e.g., Belarus, Kazakhstan) on or near its borders. One of these remains the issue with regard to Ukraine. What appears to be debated is the legitimacy as well as the purpose of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.

Recent debates on nationalism and the nation-state confront the argument of the challenge to the modern nation-state, which for Smith (1995) is “the external crises of autonomy and the internal crises of legitimacy” (p. 90). By what means should this argument be perceived, considering the Russo-Ukrainian war? What is referred to by ‘crises of autonomy’ or ‘crises of legitimacy’? The crisis of autonomy refers to the role played by the non-national actors in the decision-making and framing of other states, and as a result the crisis of legitimacy is the questioning of how democratic the actors are in employing this power beyond their territory. It is clearly the protectionist national policy arising from outside which comes into play, while confronting another nationalism inside, as nationalism here is understood as “cultural sensibility of sovereignty the concomitant of the coordination of the administrative power within the bounded nation-state” (Giddens, 1985:219).

Since other state or even non-state actors influence the process through decision-shaping and framing, just how sovereign is the state in making these decisions? Bringing this into account, there is an ongoing political conflict as well as competing strategies on the Ukrainian territory, both of which are solely driven by neither the nation nor the state, but by foreign influence. Habermas counts this as the pressure of de-nationalization⁴. This brings the debate to what is stated in the name of this study as emerging political attitudes neither fueled by the whole national feeling, nor as a part of a state policy. This bears the questioning of the start of a de-nationalization for Ukraine, or in opposite a re-nationalization project.

All attention – media, university, politics – in today’s Russo-Ukrainian war is given to the warzone. The real warzone is in the minds of both the Ukrainians and Russians. For Ukrainians, the fight is with the country’s past, its very history, whether this be the imperialist or Soviet eras. Ukraine is attempting to restore what ‘Ukrainian’ means for the people and how it would position against its *Others*. For the Russians, the purpose is to embrace what is believed to be theirs; however, this leads to embarrassment, as the full scale of invasion has turned into an agony of acting with guilt and how this would affect being ‘Russian’ in the long run, since the two nations are known to share a Slavic brotherhood. Spivak argued the “splendid misery of inequality among men which is bound up with the development of the natural tendencies of the human race, and the speculation that war might be designed by supreme wisdom to furnish a drive developing all talents serviceable for culture” (1999:9). In agreement with this statement, war is directly related with identity and negatively transforms it into an ugly face. Yet the reason of the war itself is to “denazify” Ukraine since President Putin has vowed “to protect the people that are subjected to abuse and genocide from the Kiev regime” (Putin, 2022). Starting from its independence Ukraine has tried to correct its historical and ideological past, since all the policies pursued till today are and were about controlling the minds via knowledge and language. The same can be said for the policy of the Russian state, which was to ensure unity via communication and thought. And the most important key for this was the dissemination of the Russian language. Therefore, the emphasis on the Russian language and culture and the increasing pressure on different ethnic groups reveal the main character of this policy of Russification. The “Rusifikasiya” policy was

carried out through three basic structures: education, state authority and the Russian Orthodox church.

In Renan's words "the true character of a nation is constantly being reinvented; old symbols can and do attain new meanings. Even nationalists can be critical of their own particular culture; they can aspire to change it, develop it, or redefine it" (Tamir, 1993:6). In such an international environment the nation-state certainly is under a transformation; however, the question behind this argument is whether it has the role or true impact to change it, especially in cases like Ukraine. The paper will proceed through an analysis of three important facets of nation building: history, territory, and culture.

2.1. History

Historical narrative is important for nation building projects. The confrontation between Ukrainian and Russian identities dates to the 14th century, first during the era of Yuri II Boleslaus, when today's Ukraine was called Little Russia, "Dux totius Russiae Minoris," and the usage of this label continued during Casimir III the Great up to the late 19th century. The second dimension of Ukraine's history is about its "non-historicity" which is about its interruption by outside forces. For instance, Kievan Rus which existed between the 9th and 13th centuries, was a multi-ethnic state consisting of Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian people, a land stretching between the Baltic and Black Seas, claimed to be the fatherland of today's Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. After the collapse of the Kievan Rus, the Galician-Volhynian Kingdom emerged as an important state in the region, until it was swallowed by Poland, becoming a Province of Ruthenia. The roots of today's Ukrainian identity and its subordinate position are a historical issue, slowly emerging under the shadow of first Polishness and then Russianness, thanks to its Slavic ethnic origin. Kuzio (2001) emphasizes "unifying three eastern Slavs belonging to a common and fraternal Slavic and Russian Orthodox civilization from Kievan Rus to present" (p. 125). The first ever uprising against the dominant powers, namely Polish and the Commonwealth, is known to be in the Khmelnytska era in the 17th century. The revolt was the attempt to express Ukrainian sovereignty and identity against outside rule. The war resulted in the establishment of the Cossack Hetmanate under Russian protection. Ukrainians did manage to get rid of Polish pressure, however this time falling under Russian dominance.

It was a "transfer of Ukraine from Polish to Russian orbit" (Rudnystsky, 1987:79) which was later abolished by Tsarist Russia under the rule of Catherine II. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, under Russian dominance, the left bank of the Dnieper was called Little Russia (Malorossiiia) and the southwestern lands were called New Russia (Novorossiiia). For Iurii Badzo (1980) the problem stems from the "falsification of Ukrainian history by Russian great-power nationalism, which is the most important factor in the national oppression of the Ukrainian people" (pp.17-18; cf. Rudnystsky, 1987:88). It is clear that (Imperial) Russia has manipulated the historical consciousness of Ukraine, as if there was no language, no culture, even no territory named Ukraine. Ukraine, alongside Belorussia, was considered to be a part of the "All-Russian national project based on the idea of common political history of Russia (Great Russia), Ukraine (Little Russia), including Galicia (Red Russia), and Belorussia (White Russia), all originating from the Kievan Rus" (Kiryukin, 2015:1). As seen from these examples Ukraine was qualified as Russia, like others, throughout the history. With such adjectives like 'little,' 'red,' or 'white,' they were evaluated as an extension of Russian territory.

The second real resistance toward outside pressure was the *Ukrainofilstvo* movement in the 19th century. This is evaluated to be the first ever awakening of today's modern Ukrainian identity. As Rudnystsky emphasized, the history of Ukraine is "caught between the Russian hammer and the Polish anvil" (1987:xii). Throughout its history Ukraine has always been a ground for Russo-Polish struggle. This has clearly affected the development of its national

consciousness. However, it was in western Ukraine, which was then under the control of Austro-Hungarian rule, that the national movement gained success. The Ukrainians (then called Ruthenians) were recognized as a national minority. This was the first steps of today's Ukrainian nation to develop under rule of foreign powers and receive certain rights and privileges. And to gain independence, Ukrainians pursued an anti-imperialist nationalism. The flourishing of ideas was a result of the Ukrainian writers, historians, and poets being bilingual. There developed two streams of literary works: writings in the Ukrainian language embodying loyalty to the Tsarist Russia, and writings expressing anti-Russian, anti-imperialism ideas. The dissemination of literature led to a movement of Ukrainophile patriots organized to defend the homeland against the *Other*, leading to the awareness of Ukraine being distinct from Russia. This brings the issue to another prominent concept in nationalism studies, namely territory, and territorial belonging.

2.2. Territory

As indicated above, the history of Ukraine does intersect with that of Russia. With the increasing level of transnational bonds, the fluidity of boundaries is an important issue, in which "the nation seeks to define itself in relation to what is outside or beyond its boundaries" (Spencer & Wollman, 2002:50). How may the nation continue defining itself with a set of barriers or boundaries in contemporary politics? The status of territory in the Ukrainian case is no new issue. As summarized above, the land of today's Ukraine has accommodated many empires and has shifted from one to another throughout history, just to give a few examples, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Habsburg Empire, Tsarist Russia, the Ottoman Empire, each of them leaving different marks on this land.⁵ The issue of territory is important to understand the case of Ukraine and its flexible territory because of outside interventions. In postcolonial studies a well-known concept is introduced to understand the fluidity of boundaries, namely de-territorialization.⁶ For Bhabha de-territorialization is linked to the notion of "in-betweenness." Bhabha's notion of in-betweenness refers to "a creative 'third' space between traditional readings of the nation and readings of resistance...the general instability of nations and the potential restructuring of national identity" (1994:172-3). The Ukrainian identity is a sum of many cultures and because of this multiplicity, it becomes difficult for the country to isolate itself when re-constructing its identity via its borders. In the case of Ukraine, there are two dimensions of de-territorialization. The first disagreement is between the regional periphery vs. the metropolitan center, while the second clash is between the regional periphery vs. the regional center. In the case of Ukraine, the ambiguity of borders (especially in the east and south) is causing a clash between identities. The metropolitan center is embedded as superior in the consciousness of the regional center and regional periphery with its language and culture, while the regional center is seeking to establish uniformity between itself and regional periphery. And as an outcome, the regional periphery argues it is internally colonized via policies pursued by Kiev. The concept of de-territorialization is based on the argument of fluid boundaries. Especially with the increasing level of transnational networks, the nation-state boundaries are decreasing in importance. Considering the Ukrainian war at this point helps to understand the issue in practice. The first point is the changing territory of Ukraine due to conflicts and/or invasions. This, as a result, causes confusion as to where Ukrainian borders start and end.

This opens questions related to the fixed station of an ambivalent, paradoxical and slippery journey of identity. For Bhabha, it constitutes the "discursive conditions of enunciation ensuring that the meaning and symbols of cultures do not have primordial unity or fixity and that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew" (1994:37). This indicates an ambivalent process and a position of "in-betweenness" (1994:37-9) In the case of Ukraine, the ambivalence of its borders creates a wedge for the Ukrainians.

2.3. Culture

The most important confrontation of Ukrainian identity is its straddling between an ethnic (Slavic) background with a linguistic (Russian speaking) character and an unsettled political as well as cultural liberty to meet with national consciousness. For Rudnystsky the story is a struggle between “Little Russians” vs. “Conscious Ukrainians” (1987:140). This signifies the development of the identity as subaltern as compared to Russian. Since from the very beginning Ukrainian culture has developed against what D’Anieri (2019) calls “Russian hyper-nationalism,” by which he means imperialism, this is a struggle for independence, to develop self-identification. For Hogan this is summarized as “from sacrifice to heroism” (2009:167). It is an endeavor to consolidate its very existence, and fighting back as the oppressed, to eliminate the inherited cultural aspects flowing from the oppressor, with great speed and spread, with the prominent factor being the Russian language as the carrier. Anderson has emphasized that “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which set the stage for the modern nation” (1991:39). The prevalence of the Russian language is an important impediment confronting the development of a Ukrainian culture and the nation, for that matter. Kuzio (1998) emphasized it as

Colonial rule usually brings with it negative self-images which developed and were internalized over time... This, in Ukraine’s case, led to a significant portion of the population rejecting its own traditions while adopting the beliefs, attitudes and values of the oppressor. Ukrainians became instrumental in the destruction of their own culture and language which led to passivity and a dependency syndrome. (p. 152).

The closeness shared between Ukraine and Russia from the imperial era till today is undeniable. Although the post-Soviet era opened a slight shift, moving away from the Russian sphere of influence via a Ukrainization policy pursued through education and mass media, the outcome seems limited to western Ukraine. Besides the battle on ground, the process has fueled two nationalisms in Ukraine, both claiming the right to homeland and belonging. In one of his speeches President Zelensky asked the Russians, “This is our land. This is our history. What are you fighting for and with whom” (February 23, 2022)? A possible answer to this question came from the Duma speaker Naryshkin, who described the rebellion in the Donbas region as “the uprisings are a sacrificial awakening of Russia and a magnificent uprising of the Russian soul against the petty, crude nationalism of Galicia” (Fitzpatrick, 2014; cf. Kuzio, 2020:2). With such statements, Moscow leaves aside accepting Ukrainian identity and avoids using Ukrainian identity or even its nationalism by calling it Galician nationalism, since verbalizing Ukrainian nationalism would mean accepting the existence of a Ukrainian nation in the first place. For Bhabha (1994) “...the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual, and even incommensurable” (p. 2). This is because the similarities between Ukraine and Russia are more numerous than their differences. All the similarities are built on the prevalent usage of the Russian language. Whether it be ethnically Ukrainian, Russian or an individual from other background, they use Russian language as their preferred language. To understand the importance of language in this case, it must be revealed that “it is a rare war where the local population and defending army speak the language of the invader so well” (Eppinger, 2014). In such a diversity, this makes it difficult to distinguish who belongs to which community, since for states as political entities with clear-cut borders and possessing power over their territory it is clear and apparent; however, for a nation at some point it becomes ambivalent. This is the reason post-colonialism problematizes the concepts of ‘in-betweenness,’ ‘fluidity,’ ‘hybrid,’ etc. when dealing with issues arising out of the ex-colonies. Bhabha emphasized that “the notion of assimilation, or ways in which aspects of the colonizer’s culture were adapted into a local manifestation, has provided interesting insight into forms of agency, resistance, and the effect of the colonial encounter on larger social structures” (1990:112). As a result, in postcolonial settings, as in Ukraine, the self and other remain fluid.

The Ukrainian elite, both in terms of culture and politics, were not capable of building the self, whether it be built on ethnic or civic terms. For Chernetsky (2003), “the de-nationalization of elites – leading to Ukraine’s double cultural oppression: the colonial model ... melded with the provincial one as a semi-autonomous vassal state turned into a somnolent province” (p. 38). In terms of identity construction, a distinction must be made between the ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ and this is where the elites find difficulty in demarcation, since lack of the other causes the ‘in-group’ construction to be incomplete. Triandafyllidou (1998) argued that “rival nations contest territory, history, and cultural heritage by asserting that specific myths, symbols and/or ancestry are part of their national past” (p. 602). Since it is not fixed, the ‘in-group’ uniqueness is challenged via ‘outside-groups.’ This is what Bhabha argued: “The colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rise of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory” (1994:112). This is the main point, where the distance between Ukraine and Russia becomes blurred and intangible.

Conclusion

The crisis of identity and its internal as well as external contradictions will be here for quite some time. The crisis of national identity is recently between Ukraine and Russia; however, its development and outcome will deeply affect the states in near proximity, as, besides Ukraine, other nations surrounding the Russian Federation confront similar crises. The war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation has once again resulted from the clash of identities, and for that matter nationalisms, which means fueling nationalisms at both ends. As this paper argues, Ukraine literally cannot be fully defined as a political and cultural entity, in what is called a modern nation-state, in such a fragmented environment. And it still is in the process of nation-building. The main reason for this lack of a clear national identity stems from its subordinate positioning, imposed upon the people of Ukraine throughout its history. That is why the present paper attempts to understand whether the recent war has launched a postcolonial resistance of Ukraine to assert itself via raising consciousness and to transform itself from a pseudo-nation-state to an authentic one. The only way to achieve this is a fixed identity construction via locating Russia as the *Other*. A possible outcome of the war has the potential of opening the way for such an identity construction. In addition to the escalation of two nationalisms, encountering one another in a constantly disputed war zone, Ukrainians must re-interpret their distinctiveness, via first releasing their subaltern position and second re-appropriating themselves from certain cultural, territorial and historical stereotype teachings.

As this paper debates, many states as well as empires have left a deep impact on Ukraine, lately Russia. This has led to a blurring of identities in Ukraine, blurring the borders, the history, and the culture. Clearly, this begs for an isolation from both the Russian language and its culture. This requires an endeavor to correct both the ideology and the history, which locates the Ukrainian identity in a subordinate position. The recent war between Ukraine and Russia has the possibility to start a different narrative for Ukrainian national identity based on an equal footing when compared with the Russian. It is the recent conflict which has hardened the discourse on both sides, apparently leading to a shift on how these two identities view and locate themselves relative to one another.

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¹ "IR has cognitive authority, and a hegemonic and disciplining effect on global politics. It has not only ignored the question of representation, but has also assumed that mainstream IR's language is universal and unproblematic, giving it the authority to speak for and about others." See, Chowdhry & Nair, 2004: 16.

² Whether it be class, gender, or race with the dissolution of the USSR, the issue of identity pertains to the production and re-production of power all around the world.

³ According to the three-worlds model developed by Alfred Sauvy (1952), Western Europe and North America are the first while the (once) Socialist World is the second, and finally the rest is evaluated as the third. See Norman W. Provizer (1978), *Analyzing the Third World: Essays from Comparative Politics*, Transaction Publishers; Carl E. Pletsch (1981), The three worlds, or the division of social scientific labor, circa 1950-1975, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23(4), 565-90.

⁴ For Habermas, ‘denationalization’ is about the economy, by this he means the “global interconnection of financial markets and industrial production, (...) national politics loses its control over the general conditions of production and with it any leverage for maintaining [a nations] standard of living” See, Habermas, 1999:174.

⁵ Ukraine was deeply affected by political trends like Pan-Slavism, Decembrism, and Marxism, mostly derived from Russia; however Polish and Austro-German influences were also highly effective when carried out from the west. See Rudnytsky, 1987: 91-93.

⁶ See Bhabha, 1994. For Bell, “deterritorialization, and more specifically, an ‘ethics of deterritorialization’ provides a purposeful means of interconnecting the breakdown of territory with new possibilities of belonging, where there is at work a break from the traditionally accepted community.” See, Bell, 2004:131.