

Who are we and where do we go? Contemporary Ukrainians in search of their identities

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introduction

In a postmodern world, every person carries several types of identity, using them according to social situations and the social roles played within them. The issues of identities become especially important in the times of social anxiety and tensions, when the sense of belonging to a certain community or nation assists in overcoming these negative emotions. Naturally, in the case of military conflicts the issues of identity are on the agenda, while in the period of war they become even more acute, as even the world picture undergoes changes and finally tends to be divided into two parts: black and white, ours and enemies.

“Who are we and where do we go?” These two main questions were on the minds of Ukrainians for centuries, and in the last two-three years they have been heard more often and more vividly. It was a revolutionary protest known as “Maidan” that became a turning point in a contemporary Ukrainian history.

To some extent, the revolution became possible due to enormous efforts of journalists and media workers. Soon after that, the Russian annexation of Crimea and a military aggression in Donbas provoked the battles of identities. Hence, today historians argue whether this confrontation of identities may

be the main reason for a lasting Russian-Ukrainian war, or if the explicit markers are actually brought up by the implicit conflict of business interests or other non-identity related reasons. Nevertheless, the issues of different identity types – primarily national and transnational (European and post-Soviet), but also gender, social, regional, religious are on the agenda of public debates in Ukraine and about Ukraine abroad, including in Europe and North America.

An ongoing decommunization in the Southeastern Ukraine has changed the linguistic and cultural cityscapes. Furthermore, the democratic reforms in various social realms have proven the European choice of Ukraine. Volodymyr Kulyk described the main trends in identities changes that took place in the last few years: *The very meaning of belonging to a Ukrainian nation has changed; this change was most vividly manifested in an increased alienation from Russia and a greater embrace of Ukrainian nationalism as a worldview and, accordingly, as a historical narrative* (Kulyk, 2015, p. 607).

Media and literature are the main domains for identity construction and representation, for they play the role of idea communicators

and narrative transmitters, while also being the major instruments to unite people: *Hence, the identities and issues identified are as much about who takes it up, in what manner it is taken up, and to whom communication is communicated* (Djenar, Mahboob, Cruickshank, 2014, p. 6). Media and literature could be also seen as *a range of semiotic resources, many of which are multimodal* (Paltridge, 2014, p. 23) that contribute to development and strengthening of various identities. Finally, *identity is made visible and intelligible to others through cultural signs, symbols and practices* (Ciepiela, 2011, p. 10).

The task of this volume is to answer the following questions:

- ▶ Has Maidan actualized the existing identities or created the new ones? How has it been mirrored in the rhetoric of the protest and its media coverage within Ukraine and abroad?
- ▶ How is the Russian-Ukrainian ongoing war affecting construction of identities? In which way is the image of enemy created on both sides of the barricades? What are the linguistic models to describe the situation and the participants of conflict in different media? Does identity construction become a part of information war?
- ▶ How has the conflict changed various types of identities, i.e. gender, social, linguistic, cultural, religious etc? How has the conflicts of identities been described by media?
- ▶ How are reforms transmitted by media? What vision of the future and expectations of an average Ukrainian are portrayed and constructed in media? In what way is the Soviet past deconstructed in public debates on decommunization within a state?
- ▶ Are identity issues anchored to political decisions and debates? How do the right and left wing political parties influence contemporary identity construction

processes? How has it been reflected in a mass-media language?

- ▶ What is the image of Ukraine and an average Ukrainian in your national media (press, television, radio, and social media)? What linguistic markers have been used to describe Ukraine and Ukrainians in the state of a *de facto* war? Which topics are popular to be covered about Ukraine? With what connotation (neutral, positive, negative) are journalistic statements and conclusions made?

We received articles from the scholars in various fields – sociologists, linguists, media analysts, and literature scholars. This diversity of views, domains and approaches gives a holistic mosaic picture of the current processes in the political, social and cultural life of Ukraine. We included to this volume not only the articles that refer to the present events, but also those studies that share a historical dimension. We do believe that historical analysis enables a deeper understanding of the present state of affairs, as it sheds light on how the current identities have been shaped, reshaped, and negotiated, what factors caused a conflict, what are the possible ways to find its solution, and, finally, how identities have been anchored to cultural and memory policies.

To begin with, Oleh Ivanov in his article examines the tendencies and strategies in the sphere of Ukrainian foreign policy, as well as its formation and communicating from political elites to general public. A comparative analysis conducted by the author calls attention to the crucial changes that differentiate the periods after the Orange revolution 2004 on the one hand and after Euromaidan 2013–2014 on the other. On the other side, the article shows the continuity of Ukrainian political process and clarifies the models of political communication used in Ukraine particularly for international readers. In the

following article, Yulia Soroka presents the strategies of naturalization and denaturalization in Facebook posts on the current events in Ukraine. Indeed, Facebook has become a new place for discourses and identities battles. It is a well-known fact that the Revolution of Dignity began with a Facebook post of a Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Naiem, and still social networks keep being an arena for negotiations of attitudes, values and identities. This piece of scholarly work underlines the importance of reflection on this type of new media and its influence on a mass audience.

Further on in this volume, Zhanna Bezpiatchuk demonstrates the similarities and difference in symbolic representations of Maidan in Ukrainian and Polish press. Her analysis reveals the ten most visible symbols of Maidan and their different representations by media. Being linked to the theory of symbols and illustrated with the numerous examples of media contexts, this article represents an in-depth reflection of how the complex reality of current events is transmitted via media that shows internal and external viewpoints. Anja Lange undertakes another foreign perspective on a Euromaidan media coverage. On the material taken from the three German weekly newspapers and applying content-analysis as the main research tool, she examines what political figures and players were the key personalities in Euromaidan depicting, which revolutionary events triggered media interest to Ukraine, and, finally, which historical and geopolitical context these events were put into. In my contribution to this volume, I emphasize the role of language in identity renegotiation during the Maidan events. On the material of revolutionary slogans, I show how the issues of identities and values have been actualized during the conflict and how linguistic creativity and protesters' self-expression made these changes visible to general public and the world community.

In a collective contribution to this volume prepared by Yuliia Hnit, Lyudmyla Males, Bogdan Motuyenko, Victor Rymzha and Nataliia Freik, the authors focus their research interest on a crucial in the times of military conflict point – the Ukrainian-Russian mutual images. Showing these issues in a comparative paradigm encompassing 15 years, this article gives a reader the understanding of how the post-imperial national identities are formed, and in which manner a conflict changes the images of heroes and enemies. Furthermore, luliia Vyshnytska sees identity as an important component in constructing mythological scenarios in a contemporary Ukrainian journalism. How can a conflict provoke the division of a world picture into “ours” and “enemies” and what are the linguistic markers and discourse clusters used to describe this division? The main clusters revealed by the author are geocultural, colonial and postcolonial. On the material of the essays, the elements of the scenarios are depicted and analyzed.

On the material of the social networks posts, Tetiana Monakhova also reflects on the issues of identity representation. Three text-building strategies in identity construction are observed by the author – *narodnik*, modernist and postmodernist with the dominance of *neonardnik* within the frame of contemporary social networks. Linguistic markers of each model are described in detail. In the next study, Olga Tuluzakova on the material of Ukrainian modern texts, demonstrates how sociopolitical changes are mirrored in contemporary vocabulary of Ukrainian language, which lexical groups are actualized, as well as how word's connotation created by contemporary Ukrainian authors change the word's meaning and its perception, and in a broader sense influences the readers' identities.

Turning to historical dimension, Liudmyla Pidkuimukha explores formation of gender identities in a concrete historical

period – a multicultural interwar Lviv. How were women and men describing themselves in newspaper dating advertisements, which were the valuable features of appearance, character and social status on the marriage market back then? Depicting and analyzing that sort of material provides a deeper understanding of the general sociocultural situation, sociology of love and its expression via language and media means, as well as reveals the details of everyday life of Lviv citizens. On the other hand, Lesia Demska-Budzuliak sheds light on another important historical period – the beginning of the XXth century in Central Ukraine. She aims her attention at the socio-cultural practices, represented in the literary journals of that period. How were inclusive and exclusive discourses constructed in a media domain, how was a literary canon formed and transmitted to readers? Three competing cultural discourses – Marxist, neoclassical (modernistic) and historical are analyzed in detail and explained with illustrations.

Along with history, literature is another fruitful field for identity construction and examination. Yelyzaveta Taranukha features identity construction via a lyrical self in Vasyl Stus's poetry whose texts remain to be a symbol of resistance in contemporary Ukrainian culture and thus were cited frequently during the Euromaidan events. The author of the article suggests that the notion of perpetual choice is central for understanding Stus's poetry and at the same time is the major instrument for a poet's identity formation. Following the line of poetry analysis, Natalya Domina examines poetry of a contemporary cult Ukrainian poet Serhiy Zhadan, who also positioned himself as a symbol of resistance during the Revolution of Dignity and nowadays actively participates in building a dialogue between the opposing sides of the military conflict in Donbas. The phenomena of a divine and subjective violence are highlighted

on the material of his poetry book *The Life of Virgin Mary* (2015) where biblical allusions are echoed with the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, lives of displaced people and war victims. Iryna Borysiuk underlines the importance of interaction between the extremes of such dichotomies as self vs other, private vs national, female vs male in identity formation. The texts of a contemporary Ukrainian poet Iryna Shuvalova reveals the complexity of such an interplay and shows the dynamics of identity construction.

Finally, the two reviews conclude this volume – Łukasz Kutyló's analysis of a book on Euromaidan slogans and Liudmyla Pidkuimukha's presentation of journalistic coverage of the ongoing war events. Thus, the volume not only opens a door for the Polish and international readers to the crucial facts of current events, but also offers reflections and narration models on this subject made by Ukrainian scholars and journalists. The volume is illustrated with Euromaidan pictures made from a foreign perspective, among which are those presented by Anja Lange, a German DAAD lecturer in Kyiv and by Magdalena Patalong from Free University of Berlin. These illustrations give readers the enhanced feeling of atmosphere of the current events in Ukraine and call attention to identity changes, so visible now in contemporary Ukrainian cityscapes.

Summing up, I would like to express my gratitude, first of all, to Łukasz Kutyló who has welcomed me as a guest editor of this volume and put his enormous efforts to assist me in this process, reading the texts from the standpoint of a Polish reader and Polish scholarly traditions. Then, I would like to thank all the authors for the brilliant and in-depth contributions to the volume, as well as for provided visualizations. Finally, my special gratitude goes to Olena Samsonova for her careful stylistic revision of this introductory chapter, as well as of my article in this volume.

Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to a larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship across time and space. Our race, social class, ethnicity, or gender among other characteristics, are all implicated in the negotiation of identity (Ciepiela, 2011, p.9). I do believe that this volume not only examines identities from different methodological perspectives that despite their mosaic character still have a multitude of common threads, but also represents the identities of contemporary Ukrainian scholars – in their manner of building arguments and narrations, limiting selves and describing others, overcoming methodological challenges. This is an important step in building a Ukrainian-Polish and a broader, general European, dialogue in these tough and yet bright times of sociopolitical anxiety, tensions and changes. 🗨️

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