

Serhy YEKELCHYK

**“THEM” OR “US”?  
HOW UKRAINIANS AND RUSSIANS  
SAW EACH OTHER UNDER STALIN\***

On 22 June 1944 a public disturbance began at Halytsky Bazaar in Kyiv when the trader Daria Kobelynska hit the disabled war veteran Lt. Ivan Kartavy on the head with a glass bottle. The two parties had disagreed over the price of candy and traded insults for a while, until Kartavy referred to Kobelynska as a “Yiddish mug,” receiving a bottle in the head in response. While Kartavy lay unconscious for some time, a crowd gathered around the two combatants, some proposing that Kobelynska be lynched and others yelling insults against Jews in general. The police managed to disperse the Kyivites, but the pogromist mood did not dissipate. Instead, rumors quickly spread throughout the city that a Jewess had killed a Hero of the Soviet Union. That evening, four drunken sailors, all disabled war veterans, showed up at Halytsky Bazaar looking for Jews to take revenge on. They beat up a bazaar trader and shot at another, but missed.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, an investigation showed that Daria Kobelynska was not Jewish at all, but an ethnic Ukrainian

---

\* The author acknowledges *Ab Imperio*'s anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on this manuscript. The author also thanks Marta D. Olynyk for her editorial assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Derzhavnyi arkhiv mista Kyieva (DAKO). 5/2/607. Fols. 51-52, and Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads'kykh ob'iednan' Ukrainy (TsDAHOU). 1/23/1363. Fol. 4.

born in Kyiv in 1892. Yet this quarrel between a Russian war veteran and a Ukrainian bazaar trader caused the disruption of public order only because one mistook the other for a Jew, with onlookers responding immediately to a conflict couched in such terms.

There is ample evidence of widespread anti-Semitic attitudes in Ukraine during the Stalin period. Anti-Semitic inscriptions regularly appeared on ballots at election time.<sup>2</sup> Jews wrote group letters to the Soviet authorities, complaining about the way their neighbors and local authorities treated them.<sup>3</sup> There were multiple recorded instances of conflicts related to various everyday issues, and a small-scale pogrom even took place in Kyiv in September 1945.<sup>4</sup> Early in 1953, the official announcements about the “Doctor’s Plot” sparked an avalanche of anti-Semitic letters to the authorities and incidents all over Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> But students of Ukrainian-Russian relations in Stalin’s time, with the exception of those who focus on the recently conquered western Ukraine, where nationalist guerrillas fought against the “Russian Bolshevik occupation” until the early 1950s, will search in vain for such evidence from everyday life. In Eastern (or rather, Eastern, Central and Southern) Ukraine, which had been part of the Soviet Union since its founding, and of the Russian Empire before that, there is little documentary trace of ordinary Ukrainians and Russians perceiving each other as separate groups with different interests.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, TsDAHO. 1/23/4956. Fols. 4-5 (December 1947 elections).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, DAKO. 1/3/82. Fol. 159 and TsDAHO. 1/23/1394. Fol. 5.

<sup>4</sup> See Amir Weiner. *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*. Princeton, 2001. Pp. 191-99; Martin J. Blackwell. *Regime City of the First Category: The Experience of the Return of Soviet Power to Kyiv, Ukraine, 1943-1946* / Ph.D. Diss.; Indiana University, 2005. Pp. 354-375.

<sup>5</sup> See TsDAHO. 1/24/3060; 1/30/3273; DAKO. 5/5/1774; and Weiner. *Making Sense of War*. Pp. 197-199.

<sup>6</sup> Western students of Russian public opinion in Stalin’s time, such as Sarah Davies and David Brandenberger, have used NKVD reports about public moods, the so-called svodki, to examine the traces of popular anti-Semitic and xenophobic attitudes. (Of course, svodki tell us more about the NKVD’s understanding of what needed to be highlighted, and in what measure, than about the actual pool of opinions.) Aside from widespread anti-Semitism, Davies finds in Leningrad of the 1930s some ethnic hostility towards Finns and Poles, but not other Eastern Slavs. Brandenberger gives one example of Ukrainians being seen as “others,” but it comes from a later memoir about a Soviet partisan unit’s experience in Western Ukraine during World War II. See Sarah Davies. *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941*. Cambridge, 1997. Pp. 85-90; David Brandenberger. *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956*. Cambridge, MA, 2002. Pp. 160-183, the Ukrainian example is on p. 178.

Perhaps, the writers of Soviet documents preferred to turn a blind eye to the ethnic stereotyping behind everyday conflicts involving Russians and Ukrainians. It is possible that the state strictly discouraged anti-Russian statements at the same time as it signaled in subtle ways that anti-Semitic rhetoric would be tolerated. Both of these explanations are plausible and were probably in play in Stalin's time. Yet, it is telling that there is little evidence of Ukrainian-Russian antagonism in Ukraine even during the Nazi occupation, when the German authorities tried to play these two ethnic groups against each other and Ukrainian nationalists from Western Ukraine conducted their anti-Russian propaganda. On the contrary, researchers of Eastern Ukraine under the Nazi occupation show that local Ukrainians identified ethnic Russians as "ours" (*nashi*), whereas Ukrainian nationalists from Western Ukraine were "Galicians" to them. This practice caused great frustration among the nationalist emissaries and is thus well documented.<sup>7</sup>

Ambiguous identity borders and transient zones of belonging and exclusion can be of even greater interest to modern students of nationalism than well-documented ethnic conflict with well-defined enemies. But where can one find sources for studying them? In the case of Eastern Ukrainians, one can turn to the Harvard Project on Soviet Social System, a collection of interviews and questionnaires administered in 1950 and 1951 to hundreds of former Soviet citizens in West Germany and the USA. Once an important source for Western Sovietologists, the Harvard Project has been rarely used since the 1970s, when social historians gained some access to the Soviet archives. The project's methodology, stemming from social science of the 1950s, including the uncomplicated quantification of the highly impressionistic interview answers, also seemed outdated by then. However, this corpus of sources received a new lease on life in 2007, when the interview transcripts were digitized and made available online.<sup>8</sup>

The nature of this source raises obvious questions. Nine or ten years since they had last lived under Soviet rule, including two or more years of

---

<sup>7</sup> See Karel C. Berkhoff. *Harvest of Despair: Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule*. Cambridge, MA, 2004. Pp. 206-207; Weiner. *Making Sense of War*. Pp. 249-251; Taras Kurylo. *Syla ta slabkist' ukrains'koho natsionalizmu v Kyievi pid chas nimets'koi okupatsii (1941-1943)* // *Ukraina Moderna*. 2008. No. 13. Pp. 115-131; Iroida Vynnyts'ka. *Rozмова z Markom Antonovychem* // *Ibid*. Pp. 147-169, here 160.

<sup>8</sup> This was made possible by funding from the Harvard University Library Digital Initiative and expert advice from the Soviet historians David Brandenberger (University of Richmond) and Terry Martin (Harvard University). The transcripts are now full-text searchable from the HPSSS Online home page (<http://hcl.harvard.edu/collections/hpsss/index.html>).

the Nazi occupation, people who were identified as political refugees from the Bolshevik regime were answering questions from a team of American researchers. Many interviewees were also awaiting decisions on their immigration applications to the US, the very country the interviewers represented. Both the nature of this group and the circumstances of the interview suggest the high probability of an anti-Soviet bias; indeed, almost all the interviewees made anti-communist statements at some point. But it was not necessarily clear to the interviewees what the “correct answer” on ethnic stereotyping in the USSR would be. Did the “Americans” expect Ukrainians to hate Russians and Jews – or only the party functionaries? (Some of the American researchers were Jewish, at least one was a Ukrainian American, but most spoke accented Russian.) In trying to guess the “party line,” the respondents actually revealed a lot about their notion of what the proper representation of Russian-Ukrainian relations could be.

The interviews cannot be taken to represent an “objective” picture of a Ukrainian Soviet identity under Stalin – in fact, the relation between the two is the opposite because identities are molded and reshaped precisely in the process of narrating a person’s life, inasmuch as identity is always constituted within representation.<sup>9</sup> What they can demonstrate, however, is the range of the discursive field within which the respondents operated when they thought back to Soviet times. This range was, naturally, widened by wartime exposure to Nazi racial theories and nationalist propaganda in Displaced Persons camps after the war, but its starting point was the models and tropes typical of the prewar Soviet Union, some of them possibly going back to the late Russian Empire.

How much these basic models could be modified in a later interview is in itself an indicator of their saliency, of the success or failure of the Soviet nationalizing project, which encouraged ethnic identity while discouraging nationalism. This begs the question: did they need to be modified all that much? If the Stalinist state saw nationalities as existing objectively rather than as cultural constructs, and with their own national interests that could determine individual loyalties,<sup>10</sup> only a discursive taboo encoded in the

---

<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall. *Cultural Identity and the Diaspora* // Jonathan Rutherford (Ed.). *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London, 1990. Pp. 223-237.

<sup>10</sup> On this feature of the Soviet nationality policy, see Ronald Grigor Suny. *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, 1993; Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Ithaca, NY, 2001; Weiner. *Making Sense of War*; Francine Hirsch. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*.

“friendship of the peoples” separated a good Soviet citizen from a nationalist fanning ethnic hatred.<sup>11</sup>

In this article the HPSS materials will be used to examine the discourse of self-identification and ethnic stereotypes among ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, with an emphasis on their relations with each other and the situation in Soviet Ukraine. The picture that emerges is far more fluid and uncertain than the one suggested by the Harvard Project’s unproblematic “labeling” of participants as either “Ukrainian” or “Russian,” a policy that some of them actually resisted. In the interview transcripts the interviewees present themselves as fully aware of the significance of ethnic identity, yet uncertain about how much this awareness could, or should, be acknowledged, let alone translated into political action. Even after a decade of non-Soviet experiences, a large share of respondents professed Russo-Ukrainian unity, while others remained ambivalent about the very need to assign ethnic identities. Nationalistic Ukrainians, who viewed their nation’s political interests as opposite to those of the Russians, although increasingly vocal, remained in the minority.

### *A Prejudiced Personality?*

Funded by the US military, the Harvard Project’s aim was to produce a comprehensive picture of Soviet society with an emphasis on its internal stability and any weaknesses of the political system. The nationality issue was seen precisely in this light, as a potential source of tensions that the West could exploit in the event of a military conflict with the Soviet Union. In a fashion typical of 1950s social science, the project staff tried to obtain “quantifiable” responses from interviewees, a task made difficult by the more spontaneous nature of oral interviews. With this in mind, they also designed supplementary written questionnaires with multiple-choice questions; one such survey was devoted exclusively to the nationality problem. In the end, though, the HPSSS researchers administered this 35-question paper only to 459 Ukrainians because other Soviet minorities were not represented in the pool of their Displaced Person informants in statistically significant

---

Ithaca, NY, 2005, and a number of other recent books and articles. On the Russian case in particular, see Brandenberger. *National Bolshevism*.

<sup>11</sup> On the “friendship of the peoples” paradigm in general, see Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire*. Ch. 11. On how it was refracted in Soviet Ukrainian culture in Stalin’s time, see Serhy Yekelchuk. *Stalin’s Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination*. Toronto, 2004.

numbers – they constituted only 7% of a total of 2,718 people. (In fact, the Nationality Questionnaire was originally administered to 511 Ukrainians, but the responses of 52 western Ukrainians were later excluded, allegedly because they had lived under Soviet rule only for two years [1939–1941], but more likely because of their atypically strong nationalism.)<sup>12</sup>

The detailed analysis of responses to the Nationality Questionnaire was never published, although several mimeographed copies of the report circulated in the profession. A brief summary of the findings, which the project’s leaders included in their books, encapsulated the conclusions faithfully, however. The Harvard researchers argued the inadequacy of a common Western perception of the nationality problem as “perhaps the weakest link in the chain of Soviet armor,” a natural “focus for psychological warfare,” and a possible breeding ground for “internal revolutions”:

The strength of nationalistic feelings among members of the Soviet national minorities could perhaps be increased and the feelings of the nationalities intensified by heavy propaganda designed to arouse national feeling and hostility towards the Russians. But it is very doubtful that the levels attained could be brought to the point where the issue became that powder keg, the national republics that tinder box, which so many have asserted them to be.<sup>13</sup>

The unpublished report contained a similarly skeptical estimate of the Ukrainians as potential rebels against the Soviet system:

In general, the self-image of the Ukrainians does not very well fit the picture of a group determined to struggle for independence. This self-image and the contrasts which Ukrainians see as existing between themselves and other groups shows a singular lack of the characteristics which we would expect to be associated with the idea of a people girding itself for a struggle.<sup>14</sup>

How did the HPSSS team arrive at these policy recommendations? Their cross-tabulation of various responses in this and other questionnaires showed that ethnic Ukrainians experienced no discrimination in education or career

---

<sup>12</sup> Sylvia Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire / Unpublished report of the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System*. Harvard University, 1954. P. i; Alex Inkeles and Raymond A. Bauer. *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society*. Cambridge, MA, 1961. P. 513 (endnote 5).

<sup>13</sup> Inkeles and Bauer. *The Soviet Citizen*. Pp. 339 and 372. See also Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn. *How the Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes*. Cambridge, MA, 1959. Pp. 199-208.

<sup>14</sup> Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. P. 46.

advancement, endorsed much of the Soviet regime's social legislation, and shared most of their grievances against the state with the Russians. Overall, the Harvard team concluded that "ethnic identity is of comparatively minor importance relative to social class membership as a predictor of an individual's life chances, his attitude toward the regime, and many of his general socio-political values."<sup>15</sup>

Not that the questionnaire did not reveal any degree of Ukrainian nationalism, a quality that is admittedly difficult to measure. One of the main tests the team used was a question about dropping a nuclear bomb on Moscow. Seventeen percent more Ukrainians than Russians endorsed this course of action in their written answers to a general questionnaire, which the social scientists interpreted to mean that the word "Moscow" elicited a hostile response among them.<sup>16</sup> Overall, however, attempts to "measure" Ukrainian-Russian relations brought fairly ambiguous results. When asked directly whether there was a community of interests or a clash of interests between Ukrainians and Russians, 37% chose "community," 31% chose "clash," and 32% did not answer. In responding to another question, 29% blamed the Russians for the Bolsheviks' rise to power, while 34% said that Ukrainians gave as much support as the Russians to the Soviet regime.<sup>17</sup> There was near-unanimity (91%) among the Ukrainian respondents that "the regime's policy has not improved the position of the Ukrainian people," but the majority blamed this on the general economic policy of the regime rather than the specific suppression of the Ukrainian nationality. At the same time, 82% felt that the party and the Komsomol did not tolerate discrimination based on nationality.<sup>18</sup>

It was not only the answers to the written questionnaire that prompted skepticism about the strength of Ukrainian nationalism: the Harvard team also discovered that these answers were already biased in favor of nationalism. Both the general questionnaire administered to people of various nationalities, including the 459 Ukrainians, and the Nationalities Questionnaire for Ukrainians contained the same question about the most important factor in a happy marriage. When answering it as part of the Nationalities

---

<sup>15</sup> Inkeles and Bauer. *The Soviet Citizen*. P. 351.

<sup>16</sup> Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. P. 26; Inkeles and Bauer. *The Soviet Citizen*. P. 353. Of course, the Ukrainian respondents may have thought of Moscow as a symbol of communist power rather than as the Russian capital; they were also less likely than the Russian respondents to have relatives living in the Moscow region.

<sup>17</sup> Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. Pp. 27 and 154.

<sup>18</sup> Inkeles and Bauer. *The Soviet Citizen*. P. 359.



Questionnaire, however, Ukrainians were two times more likely to select the same nationality of spouses as the most important factor.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the intense discussion of the nationality problem in the separate questionnaire stimulated the sense of ethnic identity in respondents and resulted in a picture skewed towards stronger national sentiment.

If the HPSSS team noticed this psychological influence, there could be other factors skewing the picture in the same direction. After all, the Nationalities Questionnaire, although anonymous, resembled a Soviet-type *anketa* checking on the respondent’s political allegiance. Moreover, the very fact that the questionnaire was typed in Ukrainian already sent a signal to the respondents about what kind of answers might be more appropriate. A number of respondents had recently filled out various detailed questionnaires (including sections checking on their possible communist sympathies) in preparation for possible immigration to the USA, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia; many were still expecting answers from these Western governments. Finally, the political climate in the DP camps, where most respondents lived for about five years after the war, strengthened rather than weakened their nationalistic views. All in all, this group of Ukrainian defectors from the Soviet Union was very likely biased in an anti-Soviet and pro-nationalist direction – and yet their answers gave Western policy makers no grounds for optimism.

Aware of the high potential for biased answers, the Harvard social scientists were careful not to bring up the matter of Ukrainian-Russian relations directly in general oral interviews (“Schedule A”) administered to 329 people, among them 76 ethnic Ukrainians. Instead, the project team tried to create “a situation where the stimulus for the expression of nationalism was perhaps as slight and vague as any direct questioning could make it.”<sup>20</sup> The question they asked was about the “outstanding characteristics” of the various nationalities, in particular Ukrainians, Jews, Great Russians, Georgians, Armenians, and Kalmyks.<sup>21</sup> Although 76 respondents are not sufficient for any meaningful statistical breakdown of answers and although the free-form answers themselves can be difficult to categorize, in their published reports the HPSSS researchers presented a breakdown of “expressions of nationalism” in this group. According to them, 28% of the respondents spontaneously

---

<sup>19</sup> Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. P. 25; Inkeles and Bauer. *The Soviet Citizen*. P. 356.

<sup>20</sup> Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. P. vii.

<sup>21</sup> HPSSS. *Qualitative File Manual of A-Schedule Materials*. Second-Run Edition. P. 53 // <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/5646842?n=128> (accessed 24 May 2009).



brought up the subject of Ukrainian independence and some of them also expressed hostility to Russians, 17% made anti-Russian statements without mentioning independence, and 7% brought up the issue of independence only to reject this idea.<sup>22</sup> Of course, one could doubt the “spontaneity” of separatist sentiments given that previous interview queries included questions, such as “How do you think the relationship between the nationalities and territories in the Soviet Union should be organized?” and “What form do you consider most desirable: autonomy, centralization, federation, national self-determination, separation from the government?”<sup>23</sup> But as a measure of anti-Russian sentiment among Ukrainians this question seems fair, except that the exact tropes and narrative strategies used by the respondents would be of far greater interest to a present-day scholar than their bulk quantification for the purposes of 1950s social science.

This material, however, was left unused for decades. Except for selective quotes from the interviews that the HPSSS team supplied in various reports to “illustrate” their statistical analysis, very few statements made by the respondents were cited, let alone analyzed in literature on Ukrainian identity. Yaroslav Bilinsky quoted several sentences from the interviews in his 1964 book, but thirty-seven years passed before another scholar, Amir Weiner, mined the interviews for material on Ukrainian nationalism during World War II.<sup>24</sup> As a source on the discursive construction of the Russian-Ukrainian relations, however, the interviews remain largely unexplored.

In the meantime, students of anti-Semitism discovered that the materials of the Harvard Project were a treasure trove of information on ethnic prejudice among Ukrainians and Russians. The Nationality Questionnaire contained a question designed to measure “social distance” between Ukrainians and Jews. It offered the respondents six options, all negative ones, starting with “I would not like to work with a Jew” and continuing through the notions of living in the same apartment, being close friends, marrying, having business with, and ending with “I would not like to have any of the above to do with the Jew.” Predictably, a significant number of respondents

---

<sup>22</sup> Inkeles and Bauer. *The Soviet Citizen*. Pp. 368-369; Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. P. vii.

<sup>23</sup> HPSSS. *Qualitative File Manual of A-Schedule Materials*. Second-Run Edition. P. 51 // <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/5646842?n=128> (accessed 24 May 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Yaroslav Bilinsky. *The Second Soviet Republic: The Ukraine after World War II*. New Brunswick, NJ, 1964. Ch. 10; Weiner. *Making Sense of War*. Weiner also used the unpublished report on the Nationality Questionnaire to characterize general relations between Ukrainians and Russians.

(between 51% and 36%, depending on the level of education) checked at least one of the categories – not just because of the anti-Semitic prejudices held by many, but also because it was a leading question. The only option available to respondents who disagreed with this question in principle was not to answer, but this solution was not necessarily clear from the instructions in the questionnaire. (Instead of answering, some actually wrote comments, like “All nationalities are equal” or “Relationship depends upon personality or character rather than upon nationality.”)<sup>25</sup> Later scholars supplemented the questionnaire’s data with a selection of striking anti-Semitic statements found in oral interviews, in particular, with Russian and Ukrainian project participants.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, these examples were not counterbalanced by an equal number of philosemitic statements or ambivalent testimonies, which would actually paint a more subtle picture of just how ethnic prejudice in the USSR could be expressed. Even the interesting conclusion by the Harvard team that there was no correlation in the answers between expressions of anti-Semitism and manifestations of Ukrainian nationalism was ignored. (Instead, the project researchers established a connection between hostility to Russians and Ukrainian nationalism. Anti-Semitism was widespread but apparently unrelated to an individual’s own sense of modern national identity.)<sup>27</sup>

All in all, the Harvard Project interviews still await systematic examination as a valuable source on everyday *discourse* of Soviet nationality relations rather than the actual relations among the nationalities as reported by the respondents.

### ***We the Soviet People(s)***

Analyzing the interviews by the respondents identified as ethnic Ukrainians only would have provided a one-sided picture of popular discourse on the nationality, since their opinions and the tropes they used were shaped by cultural interaction with other nationalities. Many of them also perceived themselves as part of a larger group, which included other Eastern Slavs and it is important to see if the other members of this “imagined community” reciprocated. In order to supplement the interviews with the 76 Ukrainians

---

<sup>25</sup> Alen Kassof. *The Prejudiced Personality: A Cross-Cultural Test* // *Social Problems*. 1958. Vol. 6. No. 1. Pp. 59-67; Gilliam, *The Nationality Questionnaire*. P. 166.

<sup>26</sup> William Korey. *The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism: An Analysis* // *Slavic Review*. 1972. Vol. 31. No. 1. Pp. 112-113; Idem. *The Soviet Cage: Anti-Semitism in Russia*. New York, 1973. Pp. 4-12.

<sup>27</sup> Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. Pp. xv, 99, 122-23, 137.

with the transcripts featuring other nationalities, I used the HPSSS Online search function by entering the keywords “Ukrainians” and “Russians.” I then examined the first 500 results (automatically ranked by relevance in relation to the search terms) to eliminate interviews with ethnic Ukrainians, multiple references to the same transcripts, and hits from HPSSS online materials other than the “Schedule A” interviews. Then I selected the first 76 results – the same number as that of the “Ukrainian” interviews – which upon closer examination contained interviews with 61 ethnic Russians (at least 12 of them explicitly identified themselves in the transcripts as former residents of Ukraine), 4 Belarusians, 2 Jews (one from Ukraine), 1 Armenian, 1 Georgian, 1 Pole, 1 Tatar, 1 person identified by the Project staff as “Russian or Ukrainian,” 1 “Russian (parents Estonian),” 1 “Russian/Polish,” 1 Don Cossack, and 1 Kuban Cossack. Since these people engaged in a more or less detailed discussion of Ukrainian-Russian relations, it is likely that many of them, more than I could identify from a quick glance at the very lengthy interview transcripts, had lived in Ukraine or otherwise had close interaction with ethnic Ukrainians.

Within this group of 152 interviewees, telling similarities and differences can be observed. While the sample is still not large enough to justify numerical tabulation of answers, not to mention the dangers of reductionism in assigning the often vague language into clear-cut response categories, repeated instances of similar narrative strategies can be significant.

One such strategy was pretending not to understand the question. Somewhat surprisingly, given that the question about the difference among the nationalities was intended to provoke “spontaneous” expressions of nationalism, it appears that approximately half of the respondents in my sample showed reluctance to discuss any such difference. Thus, a 24-year-old Belarusian interviewee initially indicated that he did not understand the question. When prompted, “For example, are there differences between Russians, Jews, Ukrainians, etc.?” he replied “Under the Soviet regime they are all equal.” A Ukrainian housewife of the same age answered, “How can I reply? What do you mean by ‘traits of character’? Some Germans have been unpleasant to me because I am not a German, but an ‘Auslaender.’ This sort of thing is not so in the Soviet Union.”<sup>28</sup> The refusal to discuss ethnic

---

<sup>28</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 24. Case 474. P. 41; and Vol. 20. Case 399. P. 35. Only the English translations of interview transcripts were archived; the interviewers’ original notes in Russian or Ukrainian were not preserved. Here and elsewhere in this article I am following the English original as closely as possible, correcting only the most obvious typos and grammatical mistakes.

traits could also originate from opposite, anti-Soviet political, quarters, as in the case of a 28-year-old Ukrainian peasant woman: “Asked about differences between Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians[,] she did not understand what the word ‘traits’ meant and started to tell me that the Ukrainians had suffered more than the Russians [even] though many Russians had suffered too and that the Ukraine should be independent.”<sup>29</sup> Some other respondents chose a different strategy by taking time to think (two cases recorded by the interviewer), asking for a clarification or initially refusing to answer this question: “Oh, I cannot say. I cannot answer this question” (a 40-year-old Ukrainian peasant woman); “I am not too well acquainted with the nationalities” (a 25-year-old Russian student).<sup>30</sup> Of course, such evasive maneuvers only confirm that the respondents saw this question as important and politically weighty.

In line with this explanation is a significant number of interviewees – ethnic Ukrainians as well as Russians – who initially denied the existence of any ethnic differences whatsoever: “For all I know there are none” (a Ukrainian garage worker, age 35); “No, I don’t think there are any” (a Ukrainian kolkhoz brigadier, age 68); “There are no differences in character” (a Ukrainian housewife, age 41); “They are all the same” (a Ukrainian housewife, age 24); “This is difficult to say. You have to judge individually” (a Ukrainian office worker, age 43); “There is no difference at all. People are all the same” (a Russian lawyer, age 70).<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, while some interviewees denied the existence (or, more likely, any importance) of ethnic characteristics, the majority simply shifted the question in the political sphere by stressing either the legal equality of all Soviet nationalities or their equal suffering under Stalin’s rule. Here is an excerpt from an interview with a 51-year-old Ukrainian agricultural construction engineer, in which the respondent is ostensibly answering the question about ethnic difference:

---

<sup>29</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 10. Case 132. P. 15.

<sup>30</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 7. Case 94. P. 11 and Vol. 28. Case 541. P. 39 (the two answers quoted); Vol. 9. Case 117. P. 42 and Vol. 29. Case 611. P. 87 (taking time to think); Vol. 10. Case 125. P. 39 and Vol. 15. Case 284. P. 75 (asking for clarification).

<sup>31</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 29. Case 634. P. 38; Vol. 15. Case 285. P. 45; Vol. 7. Case 98. P. 39; Vol. 20. Case 399. P. 36; Vol. 7. Case 95, pp. 37-38; Vol. 2. Case 17. P. 74. In my entire sample of 152 people there was only one respondent, a 52-year-old Russian army officer, who answered the question by describing the anthropological (physical) differences between the Ukrainians and Russians: “The Ukrainians have a round face and a pug nose. The Russians have high check [sic] bones” (Vol. 1. Case 1. P. 16). Everybody else understood it correctly to be a political probe.

In my travels I had meetings with many nationalities. I never met such differences. Antagonism I have never seen. To me [they] are all the same[:] Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, or when I worked in Central Asia, Tadjiks or Uzbeks.

*Aside from the question of hatred, are there no differences between these people?*

No.

*Neither external [n]or internal?*

None at all. They have suffered so much from the regime and the Secret Police that some nationalities fight among themselves. But in no country is there such a situation as in the Soviet Union in regard to mixed marriages. And the repopulation of groups of the population. Stalin did all this so that the antagonism would disappear by itself.<sup>32</sup>

Another Ukrainian interviewee, a 57-year-old technical college instructor, actually managed to deny both ethnic and political differences in the same paragraph by repeating the same formula: “In the Soviet Union there are absolutely no national differences. There, even these characteristics are disappearing”; “But in the Soviet Union all nationalities feel themselves under one dictatorship. There are absolutely no national differences. All must praise Stalin and say that they live well. This unites them all.”<sup>33</sup>

The meaning of such denials becomes clearer when one adds cases of interviewees objecting to this whole line of enquiry: “There isn’t any great difference between them. As for different qualities – that’s what Hitler was talking about” (a Russian teacher, age 35); “Only the Germans began to agitate one people against another. In general there are no differences” (a Ukrainian soldier, age 24); “National question is an evil one and one should not be concerned with it” (a Ukrainian turner, age 44); “But this is not really a very positive question” (a Ukrainian journalist, age 30).<sup>34</sup> In other words, the discussion of ethnic traits appears to have been under a double taboo: the old Soviet taboo on ethnic prejudice and an international postwar aversion to a possible holdover from Nazi racial policies. Yet, the respondents were often conflicted because “national character,” or “psychological makeup” – even if it was seen as changing together with the material conditions of life – was also part of Stalin’s classical Marxist definition of

---

<sup>32</sup> HPSSS, Vol. 24. Case 473. P. 105.

<sup>33</sup> HPSSS, Vol. 21. Case 423. P. 90.

<sup>34</sup> HPSSS, Vol. 13. Case 166. P. 64; Vol. 27. Case 528. P. 34; Vol. 18. Case 351. P. 49; Vol. 30. Case 644. P. 73.

a nation,<sup>35</sup> although it was rarely elaborated in the Soviet Union because of the dangerously thin line between the discussion of “national character” and the airing of ethnic prejudices. In other words, this was something with which they were all very familiar but did not want to discuss.

As a result, the Harvard Project’s researchers ended up going much further with their leading questions than they would reveal to the readers of various published and unpublished reports. Not limiting themselves to repeating and rephrasing the same query about ethnic differences, sometimes they asked questions that smacked of provocation: “Can you recognize [Jews] by their face?”; “Are there any characteristics which distinguish the Jews from other nationalities?”; “What are some of the negative traits of the Russians?”; or “Can it be said that the Ukrainians in general hate the Russians?”<sup>36</sup> In general, it was fairly typical of interviewers to ask specifically about the Jews and/or Russians in cases where a Ukrainian respondent denied or minimized the importance of ethnic differences.

For those respondents who felt uncomfortable discussing national characteristics, the last line of defense was to present them as developmental differences, degrees of “culturedness” that disappear with education and urbanization. This very Soviet interpretation was marked by frequent use of the term *kul’turnost’*, or the condition of being cultured, an important notion in Soviet ideology and nationality policy before the war.<sup>37</sup> As a 71-year-old Ukrainian professor of physics said, “In Soviet times the cultural level of each nationality was raised, and there is no difference between them.” Other respondents, even when they were prejudiced against some ethnic groups, shared the same general notion: “These differences are more common among the common people, but tend to disappear among the more educated people” (a Ukrainian secretary, age 52); “Character traits are hard to define. A Jew remains a Jew everywhere, but even they have been reeducated” (a Ukrainian male, age 25).<sup>38</sup> Some Russian and Ukrainian respondents combined the language of developmental inferiority

---

<sup>35</sup> See I. V. Stalin. *Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros* // Idem. *Sochineniia*. Moscow, 1946. Vol. 2. Pp. 296-301.

<sup>36</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 15. Case 304. P. 46; Case 305. P. 82; Vol. 7. Case 99. P. 55; Vol. 36. Case 492/(NY)1654. P. 48.

<sup>37</sup> See Vadim Volkov. *The Concept of Kul’turnost’: Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process* // Sheila Fitzpatrick (Eds.). *Stalinism: New Directions*. New York, 2000. Pp. 210-230.

<sup>38</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 23. Case 454. P. 116; Vol. 37. Case 95. P. 44; Vol. 6. Case 80. P. 11.

(“uncultured”) with the everyday slang of racial prejudice when they talked about Asians: “The Uzbeks and the Tatars are uncultured people, dirty” (a Ukrainian soldier, age 25); “[Central Asians] are less cultured, dirtier” (a Russian agricultural engineer, age 38).<sup>39</sup> Yet the notion of culturedness could also be used the other way – to emphasize the alleged backwardness of Ukrainians and Russians in comparison to others: “I can distinguish ourselves from the Germans, from the Poles, from the Yugoslavs. This I can do immediately because of the low level of *kul’turnost’* among us” (a Ukrainian clerk, age 43); “[Jews] bring up children in a cultured and polite way, not like Russians or Ukrainians, who are very clumsy” (a Ukrainian movie projectionist, age 35).<sup>40</sup>

At this point, however, the issue of ethnic difference was clearly out of the box. What remained to be determined was who was different from whom in the Soviet Union, and in what way. Not surprisingly, the respondents in my sample focused on the similarities or differences between Ukrainians and Russians – and their words reveal a great deal about how they wanted to represent their own national identity. In general, the Ukrainian interviewees in my sample were divided in approximately the same way as the respondents answering the Nationality Questionnaire: one-third gave highly politicized answers fitting with the ideology of Ukrainian nationalism, one-third were proponents of East Slavic unity, and the remainder gave ambivalent or contradictory responses.<sup>41</sup> My sample, however, provides a wider field of comparison in regard to nationality discourse because it includes ethnic Russians and representatives of other minorities.

A very significant group of interviewees, thus, claimed that Ukrainians and Russians had the same, generally positive, character traits: “Oh, Russians and Ukrainians[ – ]there are no differences, only in the language and even so most Ukrainians speak Russian” (a Russian student, age 23); “I would say that Great Russians and Ukrainians have the same traits of character. They are open-hearted, modest, generous and hospitable. They are more intelligent than other groups” (a Russian engineer, age 43); “Between the Ukrainians and Russians there are no special [differences]. They all love to drink vodka, they are hospitable, and so forth” (a Ukrainian foreman, age 41); “Both Russians and Ukrainians have remained hospitable” (a Ukrainian tractor mechanic, age 43): “There are many hypocrites among [the

<sup>39</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 26. Case 514. P. 46; Vol. 22. Case 446. P. 81.

<sup>40</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 7. Case 95. P. 36; Vol. 15. Case 284. P. 76.

<sup>41</sup> Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. P. viii; Bauer, Inkeles, and Kluckhohn. *How the Soviet System Works*. P. 205.



Germans]. Among us it’s different. [Among] the Russians and Ukrainians alike” (a Ukrainian tractor driver, age 27).<sup>42</sup>

The Ukrainian respondents and Russians from Ukraine were somewhat more likely to bring up the existence of some ethnic differences between the two groups (usually presenting Ukrainians in a better light), while at the same time dismissing them as insignificant, for example: “The Ukrainians are very similar to Great Russians. Possibly, they are more stubborn, less talkative than the Russians” (a Ukrainian secretary, age 52); “There are no special differences. Maybe, the Ukrainians are a little cleaner” (a Russian or Ukrainian student, age 31); “Take the Ukrainians. They are a more peaceful people, and they love work. But for me, I have so confused Russians and Ukrainians that I can see no differences” (a Russian student, age 28); “The Russian character is more insistent. [The Ukrainian one] is softer” (a Ukrainian soldier, age 34).<sup>43</sup>

My sample also contained three fascinating examples of nationality cross-over, or assimilation, that the Harvard researchers did not mention because they were more interested in assigning these people to one of the two groups, Ukrainian or Russian. In one case, a 57-year old female technical college instructor from southern Ukraine, whose national identity as indicated on her interview file was Ukrainian, actually claims to be “Russian”:

*Did you live in the Ukraine?*

Yes, all my life.

*Are you Ukrainian or Russian?*

I was born in the Ukraine, but I am a Russian. There is no difference.

*How about your parents?*

They were Ukrainian also. There is no feeling of any difference, we are all Russians. ....I lived in a village, where the whole population was Ukrainian. They talked Ukrainian, I also know Ukrainian, but everybody said we are the Russian people.<sup>44</sup>

There is a similar case of a 32-year-old Russian nurse, who presents essential Russianness not as an innate condition of Ukrainians but as a learned one: “All intelligent Ukrainians spoke Russian, and it would have

<sup>42</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 10. Case 125. P. 39; Vol. 35. Case 96/(NY)1493. P. 56; Vol. 7. Case 99. P. 55; Vol. 36. Case 103/(NY)1593. P. 44; Vol. 10. Case 133. P. 59.

<sup>43</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 37. Case 95/(NY)1720. P. 44; Vol. 25. Case 507. P. 48; Vol. 22. Case 438. P. 57.

<sup>44</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 21. Case 423. P. 23.

been quite hard to distinguish between them. Perhaps even my parents were of Ukrainian background, I could not say.”<sup>45</sup> At the opposite end of the identity spectrum is the no less interesting case of a 25-year-old Russian student from southern Ukraine, who went to a Ukrainian school before the war. During the war she joined the Ukrainian nationalist background and swore to speak only Ukrainian. She eventually grew disillusioned with political nationalism because “the movement preached hatred against everyone, not just against Bolshevism,” but preserved her love for “the jolly, friendly Ukrainians.”<sup>46</sup> Her abortive conversion was, perhaps, illustrative of the challenges of “remaking oneself” into a self-conscious Ukrainian in the late 1930s and 1940s. It was a treacherous road for the converted since the Soviet state could see such evolution as indicative of “nationalism” and under the Nazi occupation it could, in fact, lead the converted into the camp of integral nationalists, who were not “ours” to the majority of the locals. In contrast, a Soviet citizen of East Slavic culture choosing to “become” a Russian faced no political risks.

There is strong evidence in my sample of more ambiguous forms of “national” identity among Soviet Ukrainians and Russians understood as including all Eastern Slavs or even all the Soviet nationalities with the exception of certain groups. This phenomenon has been noted in works about Ukraine during World War II, when eastern Ukrainians apparently commonly viewed Russians, but not Jews or western Ukrainians, as part of “our people,” to the great frustration of Ukrainian nationalist propagandists from western Ukraine arriving in the east with the German army.<sup>47</sup> Exact membership of the group varies from one answer to another, yet certain commonalities in thought are obvious: “There are similar traits between Russians, Ukrainians, and Belo-Russians. The common trait is that they are hard working and have a broad nature. This shows itself in the hospitality” (a Ukrainian electrician, age 38); “Russians, Ukrainians from Russia and Cossacks, all have the same characteristics. They are hospitable, kind and respect their parents” (a Russian aviation mechanic, age 37); “To me the Ukrainians and the Russians were the same” (a Ukrainian salesperson, age 36); “I don’t see much difference in Great Russians, Ukrainians from Russia (the Ukrainians from West Ukraine are different), and in the Belo-Russians. They are all kind, hospitable and perhaps secretive” (a Russian bookkeeper,

<sup>45</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 30. Case 642. P. 9.

<sup>46</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 32. Case 642/(NY)1109, the quotes are on pp. 43 and 36.

<sup>47</sup> See Weiner. *Making Sense of War*. Pp. 249-251, and Berkhoff. *Harvest of Despair*. Pp. 206-207.

age 31).<sup>48</sup> Several respondents used the terms “our people,” “us,” “ours” or the like to refer to this larger entity, for example: “The Russians, the Ukrainians, the Belo-Russians – I consider them all ‘our’ people” (a Ukrainian tractor driver, age 27); “I live now in a Russian [DP] camp. Well, I feel just like at home” (a Ukrainian peasant, age 40); “The Galicians keep away from us Russians and Ukrainians” (a Russian housewife, age 56).<sup>49</sup>

The nationalities explicitly excluded from this united identity could differ from one respondent to another, but usually included the peoples of the Caucasus, the Central Asians, and the Jews.<sup>50</sup> Most intriguing is the exclusion of western Ukrainians, which can be taken to indicate the “Soviet” political framework of this common East Slavic identity – “ours” are Eastern Slavs who are also Soviet people. In reality, though, it was likely a reaction to the extremes of wartime western Ukrainian nationalism, in particular to the propaganda of hatred towards ethnic Russians, who were, after all, “ours.” The westerners’ strong sense of separate national identity also interfered with the concept of East Slavic unity. Thus, one finds in interviews with eastern Ukrainians dismissals of “Galicians” as prejudiced and Nazi-like: “We have a warmth of heart and therefore we are not egoistic. Also nobody looks down on other people, on other nationalities or on lower classes. It is not what you find among the Western Ukrainians, among the Galicians. Take for example Stepan Bandera. That is pure Nazism”; “And the western Ukrainians – my God! They are like the Germans, just as bad. The other Ukrainians are all right.”<sup>51</sup> Some Russian respondents went as far as to assign to western Ukrainians traits of character that were completely different from that of their eastern kin: “The Ukrainians who live near Poland, the Galicians – are completely different from the Ukrainians in the East. (*Exactly*

---

<sup>48</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 26. Case 519. P. 35; Vol. 31. Case 415/(NY)1035. P. 39; Vol. 7. Case 97. P. 5; Vol. 37. Case 324/(NY)1738. P. 53.

<sup>49</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 10. Case 133. P. 47; Vol. 7. Case 94. P. 24. See also Vol. 10. Case 133. P. 59; Vol. 14. Case 237. P. 25.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 4. Case 41. P. 62; Vol. 22. Case 438. P. 58; Vol. 23. Case 456. P. 47; Vol. 26. Case 514. Pp. 46-47; Vol. 29. Case 643. P. 38; Vol. 31. Case 415/(NY)1035. P. 39. One Russian respondent said that all nationalities other than the East Slavs were referred to as *natsmeny*, a slightly derogative Russian abbreviation for “national minorities” (Vol. 5. Case 62. P. 17). Another volunteered information that all Caucasians were called *kazbeki* – a derogatory term derived from the name of the Kazbek Mountain in the Caucasus used in reference to a person “who does not speak good Russian and who is comparatively less civilized” (Vol. 35. Case 131/(NY)1497. P. 59).

<sup>51</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 6. Case 74. Pp. 58-59 (a Ukrainian supply agent, age 50); Vol. 20. Case 399. P. 36 (a Ukrainian housewife, age 24). Stepan Bandera (1909–1959): leader of the radical wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).

*how are they different?)* They are more egoistic, have a cruel character, are great nationalists, are more independent, more illiterate – most of them cannot read or write – and less kind than the other Ukrainians.”<sup>52</sup>

The concept of East Slavic unity had clear political implications for most respondents, just like it did for the tsarist and Soviet authorities, who (in the Soviet case, since the late 1930s) had used it as a justification for a common state. Those Ukrainians that viewed Russians as close in terms of ethnic characteristics also tended to embrace the federal model not unlike the Soviet one and to dismiss Ukrainian separatism as a Nazi project: “He said that he believed that Russia would be free and he thought that Ukraine should be a federation inside Russia. It was the Germans who tried to create this hatred between Ukrainians and Russians because it suited their purposes” (a Ukrainian peasant, age 35); “You want to free the Ukraine? Excellent. But we must work together, Ukrainians and Russians, we must work not against the nation, but against the Communists. In general I despise nationalism” (a Ukrainian tractor driver, age 27); “Here [in West Germany] I heard that Bandera wants a separate Ukraine. But that will never be” (a Ukrainian soldier, age 25); “This Ukrainian business came from Hitler, because he wanted to take the richest part of Russia” (a Ukrainian technical college instructor, age 57); “But, [unlike the Galicians,] the real Ukrainians, who now live in the Ukraine, do not want this. They only want to change the regime, so that the regime will be different. They want their own state, in a Slavic Republic; they do not want to be independent” (a Ukrainian interviewee); “Of course, if some nationalities, like the Ukrainians, really want to separate from the Russian State, then let them, although I must say that it seems to me unnatural, because the Ukrainians and the Russians are brothers, species of the same people. You can put it down this way: I am in favor of a republic, a free union of free republics, with a government based on justice and the will of the people” (a Russian Phys Ed teacher, age 39); “It should be like one great, general family” (a Russian lawyer, age 70); “All of them should live together as one family” (a Russian watch repairer, age 39).<sup>53</sup>

However, the Soviet metaphors of a free union and happy family of nationalities seemed increasingly irrelevant in light of both the intense national mobilization in the DP camps and the news arriving from the Soviet Union, where campaigns against Ukrainian nationalism and Jewish “cosmopoli-

<sup>52</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 22. Case 446. P. 81.

<sup>53</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 5. Case 53. P. 22; Vol. 10. Case 133. P. 61; Vol. 26. Case 514. P. 47; Vol. 21. Case 423. P. 91; Schedule B, Vol. 13. Case 446. P. 67; Schedule A. Vol. 10. Case 131. P. 90; Vol. 2. Case 17. P. 75; Vol. 4. Case 34. P. 36.

tanism” in culture were then underway. While some respondents tried to dismiss nationalism in the DP camps as artificially fanned,<sup>54</sup> others looked back to the Soviet policies of the 1930s in a search of an explanation. In either case, the notion of ethnic difference could no longer be dismissed or minimized.

### *Defining a National Character*

The first indication of this was, paradoxically, the often repeated comment about political rather than ethnic difference. A number of Russian interviewees noted this: “The Ukrainians are quite nationalistic and want an independent Ukraine” (a Russian agricultural engineer, age 38); “Among the Ukrainians there is a stronger feeling of nationalism” (a Russian student from Ukraine, age 28); “It’s true that Ukrainians don’t like the Russians, but they do not show it” (a Russian watch repairman, age 39); “The Russians are not nationalists and they can live with everybody. The Ukrainians on the contrary can only live peacefully with Ukrainians. They’re all nationalists and they want only to live in the Ukraine with Ukrainians and with no one else” (a Russian peasant, age 26); “The Ukrainians are big nationalists... They recognize nothing but their demands for independence. For them, all other people are second rate” (a Russian/Jewish civil servant from Ukraine, age 44); “They always dream of their independence” (a Russian student, age 25).<sup>55</sup>

If Ukrainians appeared in these statements as simply nationalistic, they were also accused by other Russian respondents of collaboration with the Nazi regime – a familiar theme of Soviet wartime propaganda, although applied in the official discourse only to the Ukrainian “bourgeois nationalists” rather than to all Ukrainians – or even of servility and collaboration with any powers that be: “The Ukrainians were selling themselves to the Germans” (a Russian army officer, age 29); “The Ukrainians – many of them – served as German spies and with the Gestapo” (a Russian student, age 26); “They are a people without any principle. It is not an accident that the Ukrainians are proportionately better represented in the party than the Russians. During the

---

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 15. Case 300. P. 19 (a Russian journalist, age 50); Vol. 10. Case 133. Pp. 59-61 (a Ukrainian tractor driver, age 27); Vol. 5. Case 51. P. 47 (a Russian accountant, age 30); Vol. 6. Case 88. P. 25 (a Russian sports instructor); Vol. 34. Case 420/(NY)1451. P. 46 (a Russian student from Ukraine, age 25).

<sup>55</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 22. Case 446. P. 29; Case 449. P. 22; Vol. 4. Case 34. P. 34; Vol. 16. Case 330. P. 52; Vol. 26. Case 516. P. 55; Vol. 4. Case 33. P. 34.

war, the Ukrainians collaborated with the Germans more than the Russians. Many Ukrainians became Gestapo agents, and many were used to police Russian POW camps. I know, I was in one. The Ukrainian guards were very cruel, often worse than the Germans; so bad, indeed, that the Germans had to hold them back” (a Russian economist, age 53).<sup>56</sup>

Confronted with increased Ukrainian self-assertiveness during the war and in DP camps, some Russian respondents looked back at the period of Ukrainization as the source of ethnic tensions. In answering the question about the difference between Ukrainians and Russians, one ethnic Russian from Ukraine said simply, “There was Ukrainization.”<sup>57</sup> Another elaborated:

There was a tendency in the Soviet Union to use the Ukrainian language at one time in the offices and in the school. But that was changed. There was some hostility between the Ukrainians and the Russians. At first they were expected to teach Ukrainian in the school and use it in all the offices, but it caused too much nationalism, and it was radically changed. . . . The Ukrainians do not like the Russians and the Russians do not feel that way. It is only the Ukrainians. They think that the Russians are responsible for the Revolution.<sup>58</sup>

With the ideal portrait of an East Slavic family thus spoiled and the constraints of Soviet political correctness lifted, the floodgates of prejudice opened for ethnic Russian respondents. No longer did they depict Ukrainians as possessing the same, generally positive, character traits as themselves. Once “othered” politically, Ukrainians were also seen as ethnically different, and not in a good way. They were allegedly distinguished by “stubbornness and servility,” “slow thinking, “laziness,” “insolence,” and “a great desire of power.”<sup>59</sup> They are “envious of Russia’s contribution to world culture,”

---

<sup>56</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 27. Case 525. P. 26; Vol. 36. Case 431/(NY)1684. P. 30; Vol. 16. Case 307. P. 30. The accusation that Ukrainians were proportionately overrepresented in the Communist Party was false, and particularly so during the Stalinist period. Ethnic Ukrainians constituted 63% of all party members in the republic in 1940 and 60% in 1958 – considerably less than their share of the general population, which stood at 73.5% in 1939 and 76.8% in 1959. See Bohdan Krawchenko. *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine*. London, 1985. Pp. 115, 173, and 246.

<sup>57</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 4. Case 34. P. 34 (a Russian watch repairman, age 39).

<sup>58</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 21. Case 421. P. 66 (a Russian timekeeper, age 44).

<sup>59</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 19. Case 385. P. 83 (a Russian social worker, age 39); Vol. 35. Case 131/(NY)1497. P. 58 (a Russian engineer, age 41); Vol. 3. Case 28. P. 18 (a Russian teacher, age 52); Vol. 13. Case 175. P. 72 (a Russian army officer, age 50); Vol. 20. Case 415. P. 63 (a Russian foreman, age 43).

they are also “cowards,” who “expect someone else to fight for them.”<sup>60</sup> A 31-year old Russian singer and laboratory assistant went on:

The Ukrainian is, first of all, very coarse. He is a terrible chauvinist; they are very stingy and terrible egoists and everything that is not Ukrainian is not only foreign to them but harmful. Russians are more European, they are more tender, they are better, and more cordial. They always are ready to help and share everything. They are fiery but easily forget while the Ukrainian does not have this trait. If one is angry with you he will remember it for ten years.<sup>61</sup>

Russians, in contrast, are presented in such responses as an ideal “elder brother” in the Soviet family and a senior partner in the Russian-Ukrainian relations: they “can be friends with anybody”; they “get along well with everybody”; they are “more outspoken, more energetic, but less gentle than the Ukrainians”; they are also “more cultured than the Ukrainians.”<sup>62</sup>

But, of course, the rhetoric of prejudice went both ways. The one-third of Ukrainian respondents who expressed a strong sense of a separate national identity or what the project staff termed “nationalistic views,” had few positive things to say about Russians. The tenor of their complaints was political – Russia’s imperial domination of Ukraine and Russians in Ukraine as promoters of assimilation – but very few interviewees could separate this from a feeling of hostility towards ethnic Russians in general. After all, this distinction was similarly blurred in the ideology of Ukrainian integral nationalism *and* in late Stalinist nationality policy, which allowed for the deportations of entire nationalities.

Approximately a third of Ukrainians respondents in my sample offered a highly politicized, anti-imperialist interpretation of Ukrainian-Russian relations in which the Russians appeared as the “masters” of the Soviet Union: “The Russians are in the Soviet Union a privileged nation” (a Ukrainian railroad worker, age 45); “[The Russians] are not patriots. They are empire builders” (a Ukrainian lawyer, age 74); “Great Russians, for example, in the Soviet Union ‘are at home,’ while Ukrainians are accused of everything” (a Ukrainian student, age 27); “The Russian (Great Russian) people are the

---

<sup>60</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 5. Case 51. P. 47 (a Russian accountant, age 30); Vol. 35. Case 355/(NY)1498. P. 61.

<sup>61</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 20. Case 386. P. 64.

<sup>62</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 23. Case 455. P. 69 (a Russian-Estonian student, age 26); Vol. 8. Case 107. P. 25 (a Russian peasant, age 57); Vol. 35. Case 131/(NY)1497. P. 58 (a Russian engineer, age 41); Vol. 15. Case 304. P. 45 (a Russian locomotive engineer, age 38).



only people who wish to preserve the Russian empire. . . . You cannot depend on the Great Russians in the struggle against the Red Russian totalitarian empire, because the present young Russian (Great Russian) generation is educated in imperial traditions and this cannot be changed easily” (a Ukrainian teacher, age 40).<sup>63</sup> This general sentiment was supported by a number of specific grievances related to the Soviet period: “[The famine of 1932-33] was introduced by the Russians to crush the Ukrainians because the Ukrainians did not want Communism and the *kolkhozes*” (a Ukrainian peasant, age 53); “Russian language and a Russian person always enjoyed the privileged position in the Ukraine” (a Ukrainian teacher, age 33); “As for the Russians, in the Ukraine they occupied the responsible political posts and leading positions in industry” (a Ukrainian agricultural mechanic, age 49).<sup>64</sup>

The transcripts of the interviews also show how transient the border was between anti-imperialist rhetoric and the tropes of ethnic prejudice. Some Ukrainian respondents, who started with their stated opposition to Russian imperialism soon drifted into the language of prejudice: “By their chauvinism and by their indecent behavior, the Russians have caused a reaction among the Ukrainian people” (a Ukrainian movie projectionist, age 29); “The Great Russians are the basis of Communists and there are more Nazis among them than among the other nationalities in the Soviet Union. They have a desire or trait to enslave the other people” (a Ukrainian respondent, age 27); “Great Russians have a lot of Asiatic blood. The Ukrainian common people are on a higher cultural level. Even such Russians who live in the Ukraine are very primitive. They eat from one tureen, very often without fork or spoon” (a Ukrainian student, age 27).<sup>65</sup>

The same Ukrainian respondents were likely to react enthusiastically to questions about the possibility of a popular uprising in the USSR, usually suggesting the national minorities, led by Ukrainians, as its driving force: “The Soviet Union is a powder keg which must be exploded”; “In a people’s uprising, Ukrainians would fight against the Kremlin rule – peasant, worker, and everybody. Among Great Russians, something like a people’s uprising is

<sup>63</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 34. Case 148/(NY)1398. P. 18; Vol. 33. Case 454/(NY)1350. P. 43; Vol. 32. Case 398/(NY)1204. P. 15; Vol. 35. Case 118/(NY)1517. Pp. 56-57. See also similar statements in Vol. 25. Case 494. P. 59 (a Ukrainian kolkhoz official, age 49); Vol. 32. Case 643/(NY)1215. P. 53 (a Ukrainian driver, age 50); Vol. 37. Case 622/(NY)1719. P. 32 (a Ukrainian peasant, age 53).

<sup>64</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 37. Case 622/(NY)1719. P. 54; Vol. 33. Case 644/(NY)1354. P. 69; Vol. 36. Case 492/(NY)1654. P. 44.

<sup>65</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 16. Case 314. P. 48; Vol. 26. Case 520. P. 35; Vol. 32. Case 398/(NY)1204. P. 45.

impossible. ...It would be silly to rise up against themselves. In an event of war, Ukrainian workers, peasants and intelligentsia will be on the American side”; “[T]he Ukraine, W[hite] Russia, and other territories of the Soviet national minorities are the weak spots in the Soviet empire and therefore must be carefully guarded”; “As about 60 percent of the population of the USSR are non-Russians, they are the largest and the most trustworthy anti-Soviet and anti-imperialistic force in the USSR, which, in case of a war, will go against the Kremlin rulers and fight to destroy the Communist dictatorship”; “The other nationalities trust the Ukrainians and the Ukrainians direct them; the other nationalities do as the Ukrainians say.”<sup>66</sup>

What is interesting about the above samples of an extremely politicized Ukrainian view of Ukrainian-Russian relations is that the majority of them come from interviews recorded in New York rather than from the much larger Munich group. The Harvard Project’s staff also noticed an unusual proliferation of nationalistic statement among the interviews administered in New York, “where émigré organizations were more consistent and better organized in propagating the idea of Ukrainian separatism.”<sup>67</sup> It would be too simplistic, however, to dismiss the nationalistic views among this

---

<sup>66</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 16. Case 314. P. 49 (a Ukrainian movie projectionist, age 29); Vol. 32. Case 643/(NY)1215. P. 46 (a Ukrainian driver, age 50); Vol. 34. Case 90/(NY)1441. P. 26 (a Ukrainian transport engineer, age 44); Vol. 35. Case 118/(NY)1517. P. 56 (a Ukrainian teacher, age 40); Vol. 16. Case 310. P. 12 (a Ukrainian insurgent, age 28). See also similar statements in Vol. 34. Case 148/(NY)1398. P. 36 (a Ukrainian railroad worker, age 45) and Vol. 37. Case 622/(NY)1719. P. 45 (a Ukrainian peasant, age 53). The representatives of other nationalities in my sample did not confirm the claim about being guided by Ukrainians in their joint struggle against the Soviet Russian empire, but the majority of them saw Ukrainians as separatists struggling against Russian domination: “The Ukrainians have a greater desire for independence than the Russians” (Vol. 23. Case 472. P. 23, a Georgian NKVD agent, age 34); “The Ukrainians traditionally hate the Russians” (Vol. 33. Case 266/(NY)1313. P. 89, an Armenian bookkeeper, age 49); “The Ukrainians consider that the Russians are the chief cause of Bolshevism” (a Russian-Jewish office worker, age 44); “Ukrainians do not like the Russians because for them they represent the government [and they cannot have a] government of their own” (Vol. 29. Case 638. P. 33, a Polish seamstress, age 50); “I do not consider the Ukrainian people as Soviets. Take the last war. The Ukrainians are good people and will help people who are hungry” (Vol. 6. Case 86. P. 34, an Azerbaijani butcher, age 39); “Ukrainians feel that they have been robbed by the Russians” (Vol. 14. Case 260. P. 38, a Jewish chemical engineer); “The Russians have enslaved the Ukrainians and the same with the people from the Caucasus” (Vol. 26. Case 511. P. 32, a Kuban Cossack, age 43). The idea of East Slavic unity, represented so prominently among ethnic Ukrainians interviewees, is thus not mirrored in the way Ukrainians were seen by other minorities.

<sup>67</sup> Inkeles and Bauer. *The Soviet Citizen*. P. 518 (endnote 19).

group of Ukrainian respondents as somehow “imposed” by well-organized propagandists. Propaganda works well only when it resonates with previously held views and stereotypes, even if they were not formulated as clearly or in a political context. In this particular case, the Ukrainian interviewees were *prepared* by their previous experience of national politics in the Soviet Union and under the Nazi occupation to accept the anti-imperialist rhetoric and the logic of ethnic hatred. They just needed a signal indicating the “correct” line on the nationality problem, and the émigré organizations in the USA served as a new ideological beacon for them. In contrast, those still awaiting their fate in West Germany were unsure of what the “correct” interview answers would be, hence the greater diversity of attitudes and greater reluctance to answer.

Yet, exposure to intensive nationalistic indoctrination, which would make the majority of respondents equate their hatred of the empire with that of the Russian people, could also prompt in a critically thinking individual a logical separation of the two:

*Can it be said that the Ukrainians in general hate the Russians?*

There is no hate of the Russians as people, but the government and the system are hated. I believe that after the downfall of Communism good-neighborly relations between the two peoples are quite possible, but on the conditions that the Ukraine is a nation free and equal to the Russian, and that the Russians do not attempt to dominate the Ukraine again.<sup>68</sup>

If the politicized answers originated disproportionately from the New York group of interviewees, the Munich group produced a larger share of ambivalent, non-political answers focusing on national traits as opposed to imperial oppression. The nationalistic respondents, who had already offered their anti-imperialist interpretation, often went on to blacken the Russian national character as well: “There is a great difference between the Ukrainians and Russians. The Ukrainian is good, open-handed, hospitable, ready to help others. The Russian is insolent, brutal, egotistic. The Russians are chauvinists” (a Ukrainian peasant, age 53); the Russians also “have spread amorality, such things as vulgar words, throughout the Soviet Union” (a Ukrainian movie projectionist, age 29); at the same time, they have a “slavish character” (a Ukrainian engineer, age 44).<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 36. Case 492/(NY)1654. P. 48 (a Ukrainian agricultural mechanic, age 49).

<sup>69</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 37. Case 622/(NY)1719. P. 50; Vol. 16. Case 314. P. 60; Vol. 34. Case 90/(NY)1441. P. 65.

Yet the majority described the difference between the two nationalities in more ambiguous terms that do not express the respondent’s attitude in a clear-cut fashion. This is true of statements, such as “The Ukrainians are more light-hearted than the Russians” (a Ukrainian fruit quality appraiser, age 51); “For example, the Ukrainians are good-natured, at the same time they are sly. The Russians are harsher” (a Ukrainian engineer, age 39); and “[T]he Russians are more somber and the Ukrainians have a feeling for humor” (a Ukrainian agricultural construction engineer, age 51).<sup>70</sup> Other interviewees ascribed the differences they saw or wanted to see to social or political conditions rather than to a primordial Russian national character: “The Russians have less land, they are poor, more suspicious. The Ukrainians are more expansive. They love life. They are less suspicious” (a Ukrainian housewife, age 46); “There is certain looseness among the Russians. They want to show bravery, but actually they aren’t brave. Very few are open and frank. This has been ground into the character of the youth. They were brought up this way. . . . Ukrainians are lazy, they are sly, but they are kind. Sometimes Russians are like this” (a Ukrainian office clerk, age 43).<sup>71</sup>

Already noticeable in the samples above, self-deprecating comments about the Ukrainian national character were actually quite widespread. Sometimes, as in the following cases, they came as the first thing a respondent said when answering the question about differences: “Well, I am a Ukrainian, but I must say they like to get ahead by flattery and by fawning” (a Ukrainian army officer, age 28); “They were people who loved service for service’s sake and they enjoyed the idea of being subordinate” (a Ukrainian sanatorium administrator, age 40); “The Great Russians are more open, they are simple, they have a better soul and they are kinder than Ukrainians but not always” (a Ukrainian student, age 30).<sup>72</sup> A 35-year old Ukrainian engineer volunteered the opinion that his co-nationals were the worst guards in the Gulag, because “they were stricter.”<sup>73</sup> Another Ukrainian, a 32-year-old railroad engineer, compared the difference in national character between

---

<sup>70</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 30. Case 643. P. 37; Vol. 27. Case 526. P. 30; Vol. 24. Case 473. P. 106;

<sup>71</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 9. Case 113. P. 30; Vol. 7. Case 95. P. 38.

<sup>72</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 9. Case 117. P. 42; Vol. 9. Case 118. P. 57; Vol. 10. Case 128. P. 25.

<sup>73</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 14. Case 190. P. 41. The interviewee did not have first-hand experience of the Gulag, but this is what he heard from others. For our purposes, his willingness to embrace such a suggestion is more important than its truthfulness.

the Russians and Ukrainians to the one he thought the interviewer would understand, the perceived dissimilarity between the Germans and Austrians: “The Ukrainians may be distinguished from the Russians in that they are slower in their thinking, more like the Austrians in this respect. The difference between the Ukrainians and the Russians is similar to the difference between the Austrians and the Germans. The Germans are a more active, more energetic people, while the Austrians are slower in thought and action.”<sup>74</sup> Such language, reflecting a colonial inferiority complex, can be traced back to the nineteenth-century stereotype of Little Russians.<sup>75</sup>

In combination with the results of the Nationality Questionnaire, it was precisely this self-deprecating self-image of Ukrainians emerging from some interviews that led the Harvard researchers to conclude that a popular rebellion in Ukraine was unlikely:

In general, the self-image of the Ukrainians of this sample does not fit very well into a picture of a group determined to struggle for independence. Although they see themselves as the underdog and harbor a great deal of resentment, it is singularly uncoupled with a self-image of strength, determination or latent power. Contrarily there is the tendency to view the Great Russian as the strong, ruthless, overpowering.<sup>76</sup>

This is, of course, a simplification because the real reason for the low likelihood of a Ukrainian rebellion lay in the fact that the majority of Ukrainians *did not* see Russians as powerful imperial masters they had no chance of defeating. A large proportion of ethnic Ukrainians considered themselves, first of all, members of an East Slavic community of nationalities, and a significant number of those who did not were not yet prepared to translate their prejudices and resentments into the framework of political nationalism. As the example of the New York group of respondents shows, it was possible to turn Soviet Ukrainians into political nationalists. The sense of national difference and ethnic prejudices were already in place; they simply needed to be activated through repeated representation as part of a new ideological orthodoxy. In the short run, however, the Harvard researchers were right – only a minority of political refugees and, likely, an even smaller minority among the Ukrainians remaining in Soviet Ukraine, viewed Russians as alien and antagonistic “others.”

---

<sup>74</sup> HPSSS. Schedule A. Vol. 15. Case 305. P. 81.

<sup>75</sup> See Myroslav Shkandrij. *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times*. Montreal, 2001. Ch. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Gilliam. *The Nationality Questionnaire*. P. ix.

## SUMMARY

Обычные источники по истории этнических конфликтов сталинской эпохи (милицейские сводки происшествий, жалобы, зафиксированные хулиганские надписи) не дают исследователям практически никакого материала, касающегося отношений между такими близкими по культуре народами, как русские и восточные украинцы. В поисках более артикулированных представлений об этнических границах автор статьи обращается к коллекции интервью Гарвардского проекта по изучению советской социальной системы. В рамках этого проекта в 1950–1951 годах американские обществоведы опросили сотни беженцев из СССР. По мнению Сергея Екельчика, работа с текстами интервью позволяет выделить следы советских дискурсов и табу, связанных с этническими стереотипами, а также показать, как они трансформировались в первые годы эмиграции в США. Даже в послевоенной Западной Германии около трети опрошенных украинцев продолжали считать себя и русских членами одного сообщества, а еще треть не придавала особого значения различиям между ними. Политическая мобилизация под знамена национализма, по сути подготовленная предыдущим советским опытом опрошенных, проходила медленно, в том числе по причине крепости советских табу на проявление ненависти к другим национальностям и стойкости имевших еще более давнюю историю представлений о восточнославянском единстве.