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Ucrania: la belleza

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ISTOR, palabra del griego antiguo y más exactamente del jónico. Nombre de agente, istor, “el que sabe”, el experto, el testigo, de donde proviene el verbo istoreo, “tratar de saber, informarse”, y la palabra istoria, búsqueda, averiguación, “historia”. Así, nos colocamos bajo la invocación del primer istor: Heródoto de Halicarnaso.

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WHITE SKINS, BLACK LANGUAGES

Traumatic Experiences of Colonial Subjugation

Mykola Riabchuk

The article draws on the famous Franz Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) in an attempt to check the applicability of Fanon's psychoanalytical insights to the Ukrainian case and, more generally, to any quasi-colonial situation where no racial issues seem to be involved. The study consists of three parts. The first part examines some Franz Fanon's ideas that seem to be in particular gainful for the eventual research. The second part discusses why and to what degree the Ukrainian situation (akin, in many regards, to the Irish) could be considered "colonial", and in what sense the indigenous language, dismissed by the colonizers, could be seen as an analogue to Fanon's "black skin". And the third part addresses Ukraine's today's problems deemed "postcolonial", and explains, with Fanon's help, their inexplicable otherwise persistence and salience. The article concludes with the claim that the formal political independence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the mental emancipation from metropole and healing of psychological trauma incurred by colonialism. Besides the full recognition of the colonial experience, the psychotherapy requires a full removal of neocolonial discourses and institutions and rearrangement of underlying social and economic relations that structurally support them. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, framed as the war of delayed (postponed in 1991)

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national liberation, gives Ukrainians a good chance for the postcolonial reset and promotion of civic unity and solidarity forged during the war.

RE-READING THE CLASSICS

Franz Fanon (1925-1961), a black-skin French psychiatrist from Martinique, attempted to deconstruct the mechanisms of colonial subjugation from the psychoanalytical perspective, drawing on his own medical experience with both white and black patients. He concluded that the juxtaposition of the white and black races had “created a massive psychoexistential complex”.¹ The encounter was harmful psychologically for both sides, insofar as it inculcated blacks with a deep inferiority complex (including a widespread and highly traumatic self-hatred) and, on the other side, developed a superiority complex in whites, psychologically corrosive in its own way: “The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: *It is the racist who creates his inferior*”.²

Being “discovered” by whites, the aborigine “alone no longer exists; he exists *with the European*. The arrival of the white man in [e.g.] Madagascar shattered not only its horizons but logical mechanisms. An island like Madagascar, invaded overnight by ‘pioneers of civilization’... suffered the loss of its basic structure”.³

Franz Fanon had felt intuitively what the cultural anthropologists would eventually substantiate in more detail: that any culture is homeostatic and, therefore, self-sufficient and full-fledged as long as it satisfies the needs of a society in question. As a live organism and holistic entity, it should be judged primarily from within, and therefore cannot be defined as inferior, lower, or incomplete as long as it functions well and serves the needs of its members properly.

It is colonizers who bring the judgement from outside, impose their own criteria, project their civilizational matrix upon aborigines as allegedly

¹ F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Markmann, London, Pluto Press, 1986, p. 14.

² *Ibidem*, p. 93.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

“higher” and “universal”. Crucially, the cultural dominance and alleged superiority come not with Dante, or Leonardo, or Bach – since the natives are fully satisfied with their traditional culture and barely need (and value) all the unsolicited import.⁴ The dominance comes with technology, primarily with arms and violence, with everything that helps to subjugate the natives and enforce their obedience. Only then the notion of racial-cum-cultural superiority comes to the fore – as a means to legitimize the conquest and mistreatment of natives, and to infect them with inferiority complex and subjugate them mentally. To put it simply, it is not a presumably “higher” culture that asserts superiority of whites over natives but a sheer military force, social exclusion and economic deprivation.

To feel inferior, the native must look at himself through the eyes of the “Other”, the “Western eyes”, as Joseph Conrad has famously put it; he must engage in a disastrous process of comparison – of unfair competition on colonizers’ terms. Native society, as Fanon observed, is a neurotic society, a society of “comparison”.⁵

“When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an actional person. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. That is on the ethical level: self-esteem [...] The Negro is comparison... he is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises. The [natives] have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The Other.”⁶

The crucial point of Fanon’s observations is that the natives not only learn to see themselves through the colonizers’ eyes but uncritically adopt that view, internalize it, accept as “normal” – with all its racist stereotypes and supremacist prejudices. They become, to paraphrase Jean-Paul Sartre’s

⁴ No culture is an island, of course. But it makes a profound difference whether borrowings are made voluntarily, through diffusion of styles and ideas, by their sheer attractiveness, or are imposed forcibly, with the accompanying military, political and social-economic dominance.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 213.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 154, 211.

remark on the Jews, “poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them”.⁷ Within the racist stereotypes, aborigines are “battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and *above all*: “Sho’ good eatin” [i.e., mockery of their language, italics mine. – M.R.]. They have no culture, no civilization, no ‘long historical past’. This may be the reason for the strivings of contemporary Negroes: to prove the existence of a black civilization to the white world at all costs... Willy-nilly, the Negro has to wear the livery that the white man has sewed for him”. Natives are literally woven out by whites of a “thousand details, anecdotes, stories”.⁸

School education, intertwined with the popular culture, plays a particular role in moral emasculation and intellectual subjugation of natives. As Franz Fanon notes, “there is a constellation of postulates, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly – with the help of books, newspapers, schools and their texts, advertisements, films, radio – work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world of the group to which one belongs [...] The black schoolboy... who in his lessons is forever talking about ‘our ancestors, the Gauls’, identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages – an all-white truth. There is identification – that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man’s attitude”.⁹

A key element of cultural-cum-psychological subjugation of natives is denigration, stigmatization and marginalization of their languages. In schools, they are taught to scorn their “dialect”. “Some families completely forbid the use of [the native language], and mothers ridicule their children for speaking it”. As a Negro, Franz Fanon remarks sarcastically, “I must take great pains with my speech, because I shall be more or less judged by it”. In sum, “every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its

⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George Becker, New York, Grove Press, 1960, p. 95.

⁸ Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112. The search for prehistoric ancestors looks quite familiar for many Ukrainians who go occasionally as far as to ancient Arians, and draw from them a direct genealogical line based on a sheer similarity between the Ukrainian words “arii” (Arians) and “orii” (plowmen).

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 147, 152.

local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the [metropole]. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the metropole's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle".¹⁰

Native language is an important element of his "blackness" – not necessarily the main (or the only, as in the case of Ukrainians), but still conspicuous and vulnerable enough to all kinds of symbolical and, occasionally, physical aggression. It seems quite reasonable to get rid of that dangerous element – to hide it, to silence, to put aside, to forget. "The black man who arrives in France [from the colony] changes... not only because it is from France that he received his knowledge of Montesquieu, Rousseau and Voltaire, but also because France gave him his physicians, his department heads, his innumerable little functionaries" – his tax officers, his military and police. Then, as he comes back home, "he answers only in French, and often he no longer understands the local 'dialect', he talks about the Opera, which he may never have seen except from a distance, but above all he adopts a critical attitude toward his compatriots."¹¹

The situation is not unfamiliar for many Ukrainians who move from their villages to the urban centers – like from the internal colonies to the metropole, and then come back – just to prove Franz Fanon's observation that "the same behavior patterns obtain in every race that has been subjected to colonization".¹² But what is the origin of this personality change? What is the source of this new way of being? Fanon's answer is simple but harsh: they want to make themselves white, to "compel the white man to acknowledge that [they are] human".¹³

And since every language is a way of thinking, the rejection of native tongue and adoption of the metropolitan pidgin is an evidence of a dislocation, a separation. "The Negroes' inferiority complex is particularly intensified among the most educated, who must struggle with it unceasingly", insofar as they are "almost white" in their speech, their culture and

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-20.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 23-24.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

education, but cannot overcome the last remaining barrier, their colored skin, that separates them from the white race of “true humans”. This places natives “forever in combat with their own image”, makes them to live “in ambiguity that is extraordinarily neurotic”.¹⁴

But what about the whites who *create* the ‘Negro’, who invent the alleged superiority of their race and impose it, by multiple means, upon the subjugated people? Franz Fanon interprets the racist attitude through the analogy of the anti-Semitic mentality. He invokes Jean-Paul Sartre’s definition of anti-Semitism as a “poor man’s snobbery”: “It is propagated mainly among middle classes, because they possess neither land nor house nor castle... By treating the Jew as an inferior and pernicious being, [they] affirm at the same time that [they] belong to the elite”.¹⁵ This entails, however, another kind of ambiguity aptly noticed by Homi Bhabha: “In demanding ‘Turn White or disappear’, colonizer is himself caught in the ambivalence of paranoid identification, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution”.¹⁶

Fanon draws on the concepts of Carl Gustav Jung who consistently identified the foreign with the obscure, with the tendency to evil: “This mechanism of projection – or, if one prefers, transference – has been described by classic psychoanalysis. In degree to which I find in myself something unheard-of, something reprehensible, only one solution remains for me: to get rid of it, to ascribe its origin to someone else. In this way I eliminate a short circuit that threatens to destroy my equilibrium [...] Projecting his own desires onto the Negro, the white man behaves ‘as if the Negro really had them’”.¹⁷ (The incessant cries on “forcible Ukrainization” in today’s Ukraine can be probably seen as another projection of colonizers’ complexes,¹⁸ where the fantasy of persecution is merely a reverse

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 25, 192, 194.

¹⁵ Sartre, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁶ Homi Bhabha, “Foreword: Remembering Fanon”, in Franz Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp. vii-xxv, p. xx.

¹⁷ Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp. 165, 190. C.f. Homi Bhabha’s notes: “This process [of othering] is visible in that exchange of looks between native and settler that structures their psychic relation in the paranoid fantasy of boundless possession and its familiar language of reversal: ‘when their glances meet he [the settler] ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, ‘They want to take our place’” (*Ibidem*, p. xv).

¹⁸ A recent nationwide survey finds out that only 10 per cent of respondents complain about the “systemic infringement on the rights of the Russian-speaking citizens” while 52%

side of the fantasy of megalomania – of the imaginary belonging to ‘*Ruskii mir*’ and its alleged cultural-civilizational supremacy.)

The fact that reality destroys those beliefs matters little because they are not contingent on the reality. “They all rest on the level of the imagined, on that of a parallogism”, quite typically for any mythical thought. Fanon employs the Jungian term of collective consciousness (and “collective unconsciousness”) but interprets it in a more rational way, without “falling back on the genes” or “cerebral heredity” or a fuzzy notion of “archetype”. For him, it is “purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group”, “the result of what I shall call the unreflected imposition of a culture”.¹⁹

This explains, inter alia, the persistence of colonial complexes and stereotypes in a postcolonial society long after the underlying political, social, and economic conditions subsided or even disappeared. The collective unconsciousness still reproduces them at the level of both social norms and cultural habits. They may endure incessantly if the structural social-cum-economic inequality inherited from colonialism still supports them.

SHY COLONIALISM

The second question we need to address is about applicability of Fanon’s postcolonial insights to the very distant, in many terms, Ukrainian case. It boils down, most generally, to the question whether Ukraine was really a colony and, if so, in which specific regards.²⁰

definitely deny anything of the kind (Razumkov Center and Democratic Initiative Foundation, “Ukrainian language: experience of the independent Ukraine,” September 17, 2020, <https://dif.org.ua/article/the-ukrainian-language-experience-of-the-independent-ukraine>) [accessed on: October 2, 2022]). The closer investigation reveals, however, that the “systemic infringement” in many complainers’ mind means the legal requirement to use Ukrainian in some official positions (primarily in the government) and in services to Ukrainian-speaking customers. In fact, this does not infringe any rights of the citizens to use Russian either in private or in communication with any government body or business. They fight not for the right to use Russian (which is enshrined in the constitution) but for the old colonial right *not to use* Ukrainian – under any circumstances, even in jobs and positions where the bilingual service is officially required. See *Euromaidan Press*, “Russian-speakers having problems with Ukrainian language more myth than reality, poll reveals”, June 7, 2017, at: <http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/06/07/russian-speakers-having-problems-with-ukrainian-language-more-myth-than-reality/> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

¹⁹ Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp. 188, 191.

²⁰ I discussed the issue in most general terms in the article M. Riabchuk, “Colonialism in

The positive answer is based on the most general definition of colony as a national/ethnic entity deprived of political, economic and cultural rights by the external dominant power. Ukraine was deprived of these rights since the abolition of the Hetmanate autonomy in the Russian empire in 1764 and, eventually, in the Soviet Union where more sophisticated forms of national subjugation were applied.

The deniers contend that Ukraine was not an overseas possession but an integral part of the Russian empire – not even like Ireland for Brits but, rather, like Scotland. Ukrainians, they argue, were not racially different people and, therefore, not excluded or discriminated against – either in czarist Russia or in the Soviet Union. Technically, they could make any carrier in imperial bodies and actually did it. There is quite a long list of ethnic Ukrainians who occupied top positions in the czarist administration and, eventually, Bolshevik leadership. In fact, the argument goes, Ukrainians were co-founders and co-owners of the empire, so they should rather reclaim that legacy than repudiate it.

The argument is not completely ungrounded but it confuses two different facts and developments. Indeed, the Russian empire was a brainchild of Ukrainian intellectuals hired by Peter the Great to buttress his modernization project. It was them who conceived the idea of political continuity between Kyiv and Moscow, connected the ancient Rus' with imperial "Rus-sia", and developed the concept of "Little Rus-sia" versus "Great Rus-sia" analogous to Greece Minor versus Greater Greece. Indeed, they considered Peter's imperium-in-the-making as a common project, a joint venture, where Ukrainians were minority shareholders (in quantitative terms) but with the arguably high symbolical status (that had to provide them a qualitative advantage).

Another way. On the Applicability of Postcolonial Methodology for the Study of Postcommunist Europe," *Porownania*, no. 13, 2013, pp. 47-59, at: <http://porownania.amu.edu.pl/attachments/article/284/MYKOŁA%20RIABCZUK.pdf> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]; and in M. Riabchuk, "The Ukrainian 'Friday' and the Russian 'Robinson': The Uneasy Advent of Postcoloniality", *Canadian American Slavic Studies* vol. 44, nos.1-2, 2010, pp. 5-20. See also D. Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique", *PMLA*, vol. 116, no. 1, 2001, pp. 111-128; A. Avtorkhanov, *Imperia Kremli: sovetskii tip kolonializma* [Kremlin's Empire: The Soviet Type of Colonialism], Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Prometheus Verlag, 1988; A. Szeptycki, "Ukraine as a Postcolonial State?", *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2011, pp. 5-29.

The illusion did not last long, however, since the majority shareholder was in a perfect position to appropriate the whole enterprise, including his partners' main symbolical asset – the Kyiv Rus' legacy. Little Russia was predictably downgraded to the lower status of Greater Russia's province, and the tentative shareholders were demoted to the role of obedient local administrators. Since the second half of the 18th century, the subjugation of Little Russia proceeded in two different forms – dynastic colonization that stood for gradual cooptation and Russifying of local elite, and settler colonization that stood for mass resettlement of ethnic Russians into the newly acquired lands, primarily into the urban centers that started to grow rapidly in the 19th century.

This created a classical colonial situation where Ukrainians were relegated to the culturally despised and economically marginalized inhabitants of the rural “third world” while Russians (and urbanized-Russified natives) represented the “higher civilization” of a more cultured, advanced and prosperous “first world”. Serfdom of peasants in the Russian empire and their *de facto* enslavement in Soviet kolkhozes only deepened the gap between the two worlds putting an unremovable stigma on all thing Ukrainian deemed backward, inferior, and having no future in the modern world.

One may argue, herein, that rural inhabitants are underdogs everywhere, and that urbanites mock and belittle them in Ukraine as much as in Russia. Indeed, the dominance of the urban centers over the rural peripheries is a global phenomenon, analogous to the structural dominance of the First world over the Third world. And, from the point of view of the imperial center, both Ukrainian and Russian provinces were basically internal colonies of the same kind. Both in Russian and Ukrainian ethnic lands, peasants had been similarly enslaved, exploited, marginalized and despised in the urban centers. But there was also a fundamental difference.

In Russian “internal colonies”, both the colonizers and colonized were of the same ethnicity, culture and language. In Ukraine, yet, the quasi-First world spoke Russian, whereas the quasi-Third world spoke Ukrainian. There, unlike in Russia, the quasi-colonial social relations were ethnicized; it was not just a rural origin and low social status of local peasants that symbolized backwardness, “blackness”, and inferiority *vis-à-vis* the superior urbanites who represented both wealth and power. It was *the* Ukrainian

origin, *the* Ukrainian language and culture that symbolized backwardness and a lower status – and not against the same-language-speaking urbanites but against the Russian-speaking “whites” who despised the Ukrainian-speaking “blacks”.

It was Ukrainian language that marked them with the main stigma – an explicit sign of belonging to a lesser world, to a subhuman race of rural bumpkins, a lower caste of kolkhoz slaves, marginalized in their wretched villages (Fanon’s “jungles”) and ridiculed in both official and non-official pop-culture. Language was the Ukrainians’ “black skin”, and this profoundly differed them from the colored people of Africa: Ukrainians could get easily rid of their “black skin”, of their “inferior” language, and pass for whites. And millions of Ukrainians had actually did it. In the process, they had to appropriate (and internalize) not only the language of colonizers but also, in many cases, their contempt for the natives – fully in line with Fanon’s observation on his colored countrymen: “It is normal for the Antillean to be anti-Negro. Through the collective unconscious the Antillean has taken over all the archetypes belonging to the European”.²¹ The very language the colonizers employ to slur the natives has clear racist underpinnings as it evokes either non-human (animalistic) or subhuman (morally wicked or mentally disordered) images. Natives are vilified as either “быки, кугуты, рагули, колхоз” or “жлобы, мовнюки, бандеры, національно озабоченные” (that can be rendered from Russian approximately as “bulls, cocks, horned, yokel”, or “piggish, shit-speakers, Banderites, nationally obsessed”).

Ironically, the process of assimilation – of “passing the natives for whites” – has only accelerated after the Stalin’s death, when the kolkhoz slavery was *de facto* abolished, and the villagers got their ID cards (internal passports) and were allowed to leave their rural ghettos. The abolition was still rather ambiguous since the Soviets retained the *propiska* system, which was a visa surrogate to protect the better off urban world from the uncontrolled influx of rural aliens. Without *propiska*, nobody could get a legal job or housing in the city. The usual way to obtain *propiska* was very similar to today’s visa acquiring. One had either to bribe officials, or enter a college or university,

²¹ Fanon, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

or accept a job unpopular among the city-dwellers and assigned typically to immigrants from internal or external colonies.²² This has only solidified the negative, backward image of rural Ukrainian-speaking natives in the eyes of the urban colonial settlers and urbanized natives who had largely assimilated and internalized colonizers' views.

The plight of inhabitants of internal colonies might have been similar all over the Soviet Union. But in Russia, besides the rural quasi-Third world, there was also the quasi-First world of big cities, primarily of Moscow and Leningrad, where the native language and culture could flourish or at least stood alive, despite all ideological limitations – something that was absolutely impossible in Kyiv, where all the things modern, cultured, prestigious had to be Russian. Ukrainian culture, even in urban centers, could be only archaic and ethnographic, i.e., again, rural. This makes the process of “passing for white” very different for Russian and Ukrainian peasants: while the former just need to polish a bit their language, the latter are forced to change it completely – which means a profound damage for the entire world-view informed by the language, and a traumatic split of identity eroded and undermined by self-hatred.

The process of “passing for white” – of assimilation into the dominant culture – includes not only rejection of native language and language-connected identity, but also traumatic exposure to daily contempt (both real and imaginary) from socially and culturally advanced urbanites, recurrent feeling of embarrassment for rural, “uncultured” relatives, and profound, psychologically highly damaging internalization of superiority of urban whites over rural blacks – Russophones over Ukrainophones.

It was probably Michael Hechter who first raised the issue of “white racism” as a crucial factor that maintains the structure of the internal colony and facilitates assimilation of the oppressed minorities (their passing for “whites”) or, alternatively, pushes them toward nationalism (to defend their “blackness”). Even though “Anglo-Saxons and Celts cannot be differentiated by color”, he wrote, “racism came to full flower there, as well”.²³

²² The number of such positions was limited and strictly controlled by authorities, hence all the rural migrants who acquired such jobs were labeled “limitchiki”.

²³ Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*, London, Routledge, 1975, pp. xvi-xvii.

“(1) A defining characteristic of imperial expansion [he argued] is that the centre must disparage the indigenous cultures of peripheral groups. (2) One of the consequences of this denigration of indigenous cultures is to undermine the native’s will to resist the colonial regime. (3) Political incorporation also had a decisive effect on the progress of anglicisation, which proceeded not only by government fiat, but through the voluntary assimilation of peripheral elites. [...] The conscious rationale behind anglicisation among the peripheral elite was to dissociate themselves as much as possible from the mass of their countrymen, who were so strongly deprecated by English culture. Thus, they eagerly learned to speak English in the home, to emulate English manners and attitudes, to style their very lives on the English model. In effect, this was a voluntary renunciation of their national origins”.²⁴

Alexander Motyl who discusses a similar problem in Russia’s East Slavonic “fringe”, specifically in Ukraine, employs less metaphorical and therefore more precise term “supremacism” to characterize the contemptuous attitude of many Russians and Russophones to Ukrainian-speaking aborigines.²⁵ However traumatic had been the process of russification for many Ukrainians (or the process of Anglicization for Irish or Scots or Welsh), they were not discriminated against as individuals since they were racially white and therefore “almost the same” people as Russians (or English), the core members of the imperial Russian-speaking “Soviet” (or English-speaking British) nation.²⁶

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 24. C.f., “Irish was perceived by many as the language of the kitchen and English as the language to get ahead... The national language is in everyday, natural use only in declining zones in the west and south... which tend to be poor and subject to emigration” (Conor O’Clery, “Ireland: Could election sound death knell for Irish language?”, *Global Post*, February 21, 2011, at: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2011-02-21/ireland-could-election-sound-death-knell-irish-language>) [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

²⁵ Alexander Motyl, “Soviet-Style Imperialism and the Ukrainian Language”, *World Affairs Journal*, February 11, 2013, at: <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/alexander-j-motyl/soviet-style-imperialism-ukrainian-language> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

²⁶ Andreas Kappeler, “Mazepintsy, Malorossy, Khokhly: Ukrainians in the Ethnic Hierarchy of the Russian Empire”, in A. Kappeler (ed.), *Culture, Nation, and Identity*, Edmonton, CIUS, 2003, pp. 162-181; see also Alexander Motyl, *Will the Non-Russians Rebel?*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987.

Both the Russian and Soviet empires were inclusive enough to engage the most active Ukrainians (and other racially proximate people) into the imperial project by providing them due social lifting and, at the same time, suppressing sparse (proto)nationalistic dissent. The inclusiveness came at a cost, though: the neophytes had to repudiate their cultures and languages (if they were not Russian), their religion (if it was not Orthodox Christian) and their political creed (if it was not monarchist or, later on, communist). Any tentatively white person who met these conditions could made, technically, any career in both the Russian and Soviet empires; their ethnicity did not matter as long as it did not entail any specific cultural, or linguistic, let alone political demands for them as for a distinct group. As individuals they were exempted from colonial pressure, discrimination, restrictions on jobs and settlements, but this did not mean that the ethnic, linguistic, or confessional groups, to which they used to belong, were exempted as groups.

The fact that ethnic Ukrainians occupied the highest positions in the Russian and, eventually, Soviet empires did not make either of them to a smallest degree “Ukrainian” or more lenient towards Ukrainians as a cultural (and potentially political) community. Neither Stalin had made the Soviet Union any bit “Georgian”, nor the numerous Jews in the communist leadership had made it “Jewish”. All the ex-natives had been, as a rule, loyal servants of the Russian empire, often more Russian than Russians, and their ethnicity meant barely more than the postal addresses of the places where they were born.

To sum it up, Ukrainians were not colonized, oppressed and discriminated against – inasmuch as they ceased to be Ukrainians in any meaningful sense. There was no need to “colonize” them since they had already been on the colonizer’s side, themselves the eager promoters of colonization. They were praised and promoted as the exemplary natives, who successfully internalized the collective imperial consciousness and unconsciousness. But this could be barely said about their countrymen who resisted assimilation and insisted on their distinct identity, their cultural and linguistic, let alone political rights. They had to feel all the wrath of the police state and all the power of deeply entrenched and institutionalized imperial discourses.

FROM THE COLONIAL TO THE CREOLE STATE?

Thirty years of Ukrainian independence have not brought the coveted “national revival” that the native intelligentsia dreamed about.²⁷ The official status of Ukrainian language and some protectionist measures lukewarmly introduced by the government have not made it a fully-fledged functional instrument in any sphere of public life – either in government where officials often ignore the legal prescriptions,²⁸ or in education where most urban schools are Ukrainian on paper only,²⁹ or in all kinds of businesses where Ukrainian-speaking customers can barely get any service without a special request, that would not necessarily help in most regions.³⁰ On the contrary, in some cases it may well result in jeering, scornful grimaces or, occasionally, physical attacks, and there are quite a few documented reports on Ukrainian aborigines being thrown out of the bus,³¹ of

²⁷ I discuss the issue in more detail in a chapter: M. Riabchuk, “Ukrainian Culture after Communism: Between Post-Colonial Liberation and Neo-Colonial Subjugation”, in Dobrota Pucherova and Robert Gafrik (eds.), *Postcolonial East-Central Europe: Essays on Literature and Culture*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2015, pp. 337-355.

²⁸ “Activists: Rada Should Adopt Language Legislation, Since Decisions on Ukrainian as Primary Language Are Sabotaged”, *Interfax-Ukraine*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/activists-rada-should-adopt-language-legislation-since-decisions-on-ukrainian-as-primary-language-are-sabotaged.html> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]. Also, Bohdan Ben, “Post-Euromaidan Gains for Ukrainian Language Challenged by Creeping Russification and State Indifference”, *Euromaidan Press*, December 8, 2020, at: <http://euromaidanpress.com/2020/12/08/post-euromaidan-gains-for-ukrainian-language-challenged-by-creeping-russification-and-state-indifference/> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

²⁹ Oksana Danyilevska, “Ukrainian [suppressed] during the school-breaks” [in Ukrainian], *Zbrucz*, November 10, 2020, at: <https://zbruc.eu/node/101460> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]; also, “Ukrainian in the classes, Russian during the breaks” [in Ukrainian], *Ukrainska Pravda*, October 20, 2020, at: <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2020/10/20/242736/> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]; also, “Many complain about the [dominance of] Russian in the Kyiv schools” [in Ukrainian], *Ukrainska Pravda*, November 6, 2020, at: <https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/2020/11/6/242928/> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

³⁰ “‘Our city [of Mykolaiv] is Russian-Speaking’ – a Waiter Refused to Serve a Customer in Ukrainian” [in Ukrainian], *Gazeta.ua*, January 11, 2019, at: https://gazeta.ua/articlessogodennya/_u-nas-nikolaev-russkoyazychnyj-z-vijskovim-vidmovilis-rozmovlyati-ukrayinskoyu/879367 [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

³¹ “‘F*** Off From Here’. In Slaviansk, a Passenger Was Harassed for Speaking Ukrainian” [in Russian], *Novoe Vremia*, October 27, 2020, at: <https://nv.ua/ukraine/events/v-slavyanske-skandal-iz-za-ukrainskogo-yazyka-video-50120343.html> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

the taxi,³² or the restaurant³³ just for insisting on their constitutional right to be served in their language.

The advance of digital technologies facilitated documentation of (some of) these cases both by the witnesses or, occasionally, by the victims themselves – starting from the 2010 encounter of a Ukrainian-speaking driver with a police officer who slandered his speech as a “cow language”,³⁴ to the recent assault of a Russophone teacher on a low-grade pupil who dared to respond in Ukrainian and was humiliated publically in class primarily for that reason (ironically, this occurred in Odesa in a nominally “Ukrainian” school – quite a typical product of Potemkin “Ukrainization”).³⁵

There are certainly many more cases like these that remain unrecorded, both today and in the past decades or, rather, centuries; most of them are buried in the oblivion but certainly not in the collective consciousness and unconsciousness of aborigines. Ukrainians have learned, like the Pavlov’s dogs, that the wire might be with electric current, so better not touch it. The chance to be scorned or insulted for speaking Ukrainian might be rather low nowadays but still it may happen, so it’s safer not to try; very few people are eager to make their life into a daily struggle, to expose their language practice to the whims of a “Russian roulette”.

It is virtually impossible to find a single Ukrainian who grew up in a city consequently speaking Ukrainian in public throughout his or her life and who never-whenver encountered dismissive reaction to his/her Ukrai-

³² “‘You, fascist!’ A Journalist Janina Sokolova Was Assaulted by a Taxi-Driver in Odesa for Speaking Ukrainian” [in Russian], *Obozrevatel*, July 22, 2019, at: <https://www.obozrevatel.com/society/sho-fshisty-i-sokolova-popala-v-skandal-s-taksistom-ukrainofobom-v-odesse.htm> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

³³ “In Mariupol, He Just Requested a Menu in Ukrainian – and Got His Jaw Broken” [in Ukrainian], *Ukrainska Pravda*, June 18, 2018, at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2018/06/18/7183755/> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

³⁴ “Odesa Policeman Calls Ukrainian ‘Cow’ Language”, *RFE/RL Headlines*, January 26, 2011, at: http://www.rferl.org/content/ukrainian_language_cow/2288383.html [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

³⁵ Mark Raczkiewicz, “Hold Your Tongue: School Incident Plays into Sensitive Issue of Language in Ukraine”, *RFE/RL Headlines*, October 25, 2020, at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/hold-your-tongue-school-incident-plays-into-sensitive-issue-of-language-in-ukraine/30911506.html> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]; also, “A Ukrainian-Speaking Family Has Been Bullied in a Kyiv Kindergarten” [in Ukrainian], *Gazeta.ua*, February 15, 2019, at: https://gazeta.ua/articles/kyiv-life/_u-stolichnomu-ditsadku-zackuvali-ukrayinomovnu-rodinu/885989 [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

nian speech. It might have happened just once in a life but for many people it's quite enough not to try again, especially if it happened (as it usually happens in Ukraine) in their childhood. Because, as Franz Fanon aptly observed, "nothing is more traumatizing for the young child than his encounters with what is irrational. I would personally say that for a man whose only weapon is reason there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason".³⁶

Myroslava Barchuk, a popular journalist and TV presenter, recollects in detail her adolescent years in Kyiv as a daily experience of public insults, mockery, and humiliation for her and her parents' Ukrainian speech. She compares this language bullying to racist disparagement and sexual harassment. "As the flesh-mob #tellyourstory [a Ukrainian version of #metoo] unfolds, I cannot but feel that all the sexual assaults, harassments and other abuses I experienced as a teenager are thoroughly overshadowed by a much deeper and everlasting language trauma."³⁷ This largely explains, I believe, why in all urban centers (beyond Western Ukraine, which is a special case, not discussed here) many more people speak Ukrainian at home than in public (as sociological surveys graphically confirm).³⁸ This seems to explain also why so many Ukrainians who do not speak Ukrainian as their primary language (if at all) still declare Ukrainian as their "native" language in surveys and support, in principle, various measures aimed at its official promotion and revival.³⁹ They apparently want to have more Ukrainian in

³⁶ Fanon, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

³⁷ Myroslava Barchuk, "On a Language Psycho-Trauma and the Ukrainian Ghetto" [in Ukrainian], *Obozrevatel*, April 22, 2017, at: <https://www.obozrevatel.com/society/21594-pro-movnu-psihotravmu-i-ukrainske-etto.htm> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

³⁸ According to a 2017 nationwide survey, the same number of people speak Ukrainian both at home and in public (91%) only in Western Ukraine. In all other regions, at least 4-5 per cent of Ukrainian-speakers do not dare to use their language in public (there is a good reason to believe that the real figures are higher since many respondents tend to suppress the embarrassing truth). All in all, in the Center, 63% of respondents claim they speak Ukrainian at home but only 59% do it in public; in the South the proportion is 26% vs. 22%; in the East – 14% vs. 9%. ("Identity of Ukrainian Citizens" [in Ukrainian], *Natsionalna bezpeka i oborona*, no. 1-2, 2017, pp. 3-61, p. 26, at: http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/ukr/NSD169-170_2017_ukr.pdf) [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

³⁹ In the same 2017 survey, 68 per cent of respondents declared their "native language" Ukrainian, 14% claimed Russian, and 17% claimed equally both languages (*Ibidem*, p. 26). At the same time, only 49 per cent of respondents dare to speak Ukrainian in public, while 27% speak only Russian, and 24% employ both languages "depending on circumstances"

their life and the life of their children but are constrained by both the unfriendly environment and their own historically informed “collective unconsciousness”.⁴⁰

The language-related insults are usually dismissed by officials as a sheer “rudeness” or, if turned violent, are qualified occasionally as “hooliganism”. Yet, they are never identified as a hate crime – an assault on the very essence of person’s identity, a symbolical replay of the old historical drama of social-cum-cultural domination of “whites” over “blacks”. On the one side, we still have a petit colonizer supremacism, a “poor man’s snobbery”, a paranoid alternating “between fantasies of megalomania and persecution” – megalomania of white (Russian) superiority, and imaginary persecution from the sinister “Ukrainizers” (who, in fact, only want to be served in Ukrainian in their own country for their own money).⁴¹ On the other side, we have a traumatic experience of oppressed and belittled natives who either internalized their inferior image and accepted the normalcy of Russian-speaking

(Rating Sociological Group, “Dynamics of Social and Political Views in Ukraine” [in Ukrainian], March 2018, p. 71, at: <https://www.slideshare.net/Ratinggroup/iri-98085328> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]). The new survey that required to list only one “native” language (without the dual “both” option) indicated that 73% consider Ukrainian their native language, and 22% claim Russian. Yet, again, the language usage is highly discrepant: 24% of respondents speak only or mostly Russian in public (the groups is largely congruent with those whose “native” language is Russian), while merely 57% speak only or mostly Ukrainian, whereas 16% claim the “equal” use of both languages (that, under Ukraine’s peculiar circumstance, means “mostly Russian”). Remarkably, the latter 16% are made mostly (almost exclusively) of the respondents whose “native” language is reportedly Ukrainian (Razumkov, “Ukrainian language...”).

⁴⁰ See an excellent analysis of the large-scale discrepancy between language practice and identity in V. Kulyk, “Language Identity, Linguistic Diversity and Political Cleavages: Evidence from Ukraine,” *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2011, pp. 627-648. He finds out a strong correlation between people’s identifications with Ukrainian language and their support for developments and policies favoring it – even if they do not speak Ukrainian themselves. He concludes that the language people care about might be more important than the language they actually speak. And introduces the notion of “language identity” that often is more congruous with ethno-cultural belonging than with language practice and, as such, “influences people’s views of other culturally sensitive issues, including (but arguably not limited to) those of foreign policy and historical memory” (*Ibidem*, p. 644).

⁴¹ As a Ukrainian author has aptly observed long ago, “they are not demanding a legalization of the obligation of Ukrainian-speaking citizens to know Russian (they know it), but the right of Russian speakers not to know Ukrainian” (V. Kulyk, “The Search for Post-Soviet Identity in Ukraine and Russia and Its Influence on the Relations between the Two States”, *The Harriman Review* vol. 9, nos. 1-2, 1996, pp. 197-221).

(or, more precisely, *Ukrainian non-speaking*) in public, or uprose against that tradition, challenged the “normalcy” and declared themselves humans without renouncing their black skin. This is a clear affront, a provocative “showing off”, and petit colonizers perfectly feel it – responding with scornful remarks, language mockery and, on a more ideological level, with outcries over “Ukrainian far-right nationalism” and “forcible Ukrainization”.⁴² (Remarkably, to the best of my knowledge, there are no similar records of the language-based insults at Russian-speakers from aborigines; the colonial cultural rivalry tends to be clearly a one-gate play).⁴³

But why this century-old encounter between the natives and colonizers is still re-enacted in the realm of discourses and ideologies, language practices and social habits? Why neither a “poor man’s snobbery” nor inferiority complexes pass away – even though the empire has gone, with all its oppressive practices, coercive institutions, and monopolistic discourses? Sure, one may argue that the empire is still alive, as rogue as ever, and its discourses are still disseminated by dozens of agents and volunteers, media outlets and internet trolls; its institutions have largely survived in Ukraine and serve basically the same elite that had ruled the colony on behalf of the metropole for decades.

Back in 1991, that elite appeared clever enough to pact with natives against the imperial center and privatize a huge country as an independent state or, rather, as a private oligarchic fiefdom. The natives were not very strong but were mobilized and vociferous, so some concessions for them had to be made, mostly of symbolical nature, like anthem, flag, or Potemkin “Ukrainization”. The presidents and many other officials started routinely to deliver Ukrainian speeches at public events but this was rightly seen as a part of the ritual and had hardly more impact on public speech

⁴² As a popular website has reported recently, even a modest attempt to introduce Ukrainian alongside with Russian in Kharkiv drew some supermarket customers furious and provoked a tide of insults. “We did not expect such a boorish reaction,” a supermarket worker confessed. See: “‘Naff Off Into Your Banderland’: a Language Scandal in Kharkiv”, *Obozrevatel* [in Russian], April 21, 2017, at: <https://www.obozrevatel.com/society/21845-vali-v-svoyu-banderovschinu-v-harkove-proizoshel-yazykovoj-skandal.htm> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

⁴³ C.f. Yaryna Yasynevyh, “The Lviv Language Model” [in Ukrainian], *Zbrucz*, November 9, 2020, at: <https://zbruc.eu/node/101435> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

than liturgical Latin or Church Slavonic had on the daily vernacular of parishioners.

The problem has been and remains not so much of the language usage by Ukrainian officials, and not even its introduction in education or protection in media and popular culture, but of failure to *normalize* it in the public sphere, primarily in all kind of services as it affects the daily life of virtually all citizens. This is exactly the sphere where the resistance of petite colonizers, the “poor man’s snobbery” is perhaps the strongest since it’s the only place where they still can assert (subconsciously) some kind of superiority against “inferior and pernicious beings”. In Soviet times, all the customers were subjects of such a contempt, but capitalism put some restrictions on this type of self-aggrandizing; it seems that the only legitimate target for these practices remained the occasional Ukrainian-speakers who dare to deviate from the Russian-speaking “norm”. First, these brave-hearts are rather small in number, so the lost profit will not be great even if they turn to another provider; secondly, they do not represent the wealthiest and most influential part of the society, so there is nothing to particularly regret or worry about; and finally, this kind of contempt is basically impossible to prove and penalize: there was no insult, the employees maintain, we just use our native language, it is more convenient for us and not so inconvenient for Ukrainians insofar as all of them perfectly understand Russian. So what’s the problem? Banal colonialism operates more or less like a banal nationalism, deconstructed by Michael Billig: it draws on social conventions, disguises as “normalcy”, and remains largely invisible. Its work can hardly be understood without a closer look at collective consciousness and unconsciousness that, in the case of Ukraine, is informed not only by the historical legacy of colonial subjugation but also by a very specific, essentially neocolonial modification of these relations after the independence.

The crux of the matter is that the social-economic discrepancy – between the backward Ukrainian-speaking province and advanced, better-off urban centers with the colonial, thoroughly Russified elite on the top, – has not substantially changed, even though some Ukrainophone natives were incorporated into the government at various levels, primarily in the spheres of culture and education that have a symbolical value but bring little rent,

and therefore have been traditionally outsourced to the moderate natives who never questioned the essence of the postcolonial system.

We have no sociological data to study the Ukrainian elite but at the level of sheer observations we can argue (until anybody proves the opposite) that Ukraine, three decades after independence, still is ruled by the (post)colonial creole-type elite that opportunistically opted for the secession from Moscow, pacted with natives (that dominated the democratic, anti-communist opposition at the time), made them some important (mostly symbolical) concessions, but retained the dominance in state governance and administration, firmly shored up by total control (actually capture) of the economy.

To the best of my knowledge, none Ukrainian oligarch is a Ukrainian-speaker in either his business or personal life; not a single Ukrainian president (with the minor exception of Viktor Yushchenko) was a Ukrainian-speaker (in his private, informal communication, including talks with his drivers, secretaries and body-guards), and very few ministers, top officials and politicians could be listed as representatives of “aboriginal”, Ukrainian-speaking community. Having no sociological data on the language practices and preferences of Ukrainian “elites”, we can rely on another valuable source – their informal conversations covertly recorded in their offices or intercepted in phones and publicized by the journalists, mostly within the framework of oligarchic turf wars.

The largest collections of such conversation comes from the 1999–2000 “Melnychenko tapes” recorded allegedly by Leonid Kuchma’s bodyguard and containing president’s talks with dozens of top officials who visited his cabinet.⁴⁴ Many more covert records have been publicized since, with the voices of top politicians and businessmen,⁴⁵ judges and

⁴⁴ “Tapes (audio-records) of major Mykola Melnychenko” [full collection, mostly in Russian], *Protocol*, July 9, 2014, at: [https://protocol.ua/ua/plivki_\(audiozapisi\)_mayora_mikoli_melnichenko/](https://protocol.ua/ua/plivki_(audiozapisi)_mayora_mikoli_melnichenko/) [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

⁴⁵ “The wiretapped conversation between [top politician Yulia] Tymoshenko and [top oligarch Igor] Kolomoysky” [in Russian], *Youtube*, March 11, 2019, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K45ocwnlQyc> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]; also, conversations of Igor Kononenko, the business-partner of Petro Poroshenko and deputy head of the parliamentary faction of Poroshenko’s party, with state officials and businessmen – “‘P. Has Approved’: How President’s Friend Kononenko Made Dough on the Shady Deals in the Energy Sector,” *Radio Svoboda*, March 28, 2019, at: <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/schemes/29848144>.

prosecutors,⁴⁶ mayors and ministers,⁴⁷ there are even two closed sessions of the cabinet of ministers recorded in a pretty good quality.⁴⁸ Nearly all of them – 99 per cent at least – are carried out in Russian. And in most cases, it is not just Russian but a semi-criminal slang, full of swear words, toilet humor and thorough cynicism related to both the state affairs and their own duties.

Any language is a world-view; and the language of Ukrainian “elite” is a clear expression of the *sovok* mentality,⁴⁹ the same style that one may discern, say, in Putin’s peculiar “jokes” or Lukashenko’s grumblings. The policies of this kind of “elite” had been highly opportunistic from the very

html [accessed on: October, 2, 2022]; see also the earlier ‘business’-correspondence of the same Kononenko with a top oligarch and former MP from the Yanukovych party (technically, his political arch-enemy) Oleksandr Onyshchenko: “Leshchenko Disclosed the Correspondence Between Onyshchenko and Kononenko Worth 7 mln UAH”, *Ukrainska Pravda*, December 10, 2016, at: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/12/10/7129463/> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

⁴⁶ The largest and most comprehensive collection of conversations between the top judges and other officials has been officially wiretapped by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and publicized in July and August 2020. As a Ukrainian expert sums it up, “the conversations, mostly in Russian, use coarse language and demonstrate a staggering level of cynicism. At one point, for example, [the head of the District Administrative Court in Kyiv Pavlo] Vovk asks if anyone doubted their ‘political prostitution’ while elsewhere he effectively boasts that their court has survived untouched by all the reforms”. (Halya Coynash, “Over 10 Thousand Ukrainians Demand that Zelensky Dissolves Corruption-Tainted Kyiv Court”, *Human Rights in Ukraine*, July 10, 2020, at: <http://khp.org/en/index.php?id=1601994829>) [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

⁴⁷ “Top Officials of the Ministry of Defense Discuss the Purchase of Defective Body Armors,” *TSN*, July 9, 2019, at: <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/kevlaroviy-skandal-dbr-opublikovalo-pere-movini-posadovciv-minoboroni-pro-brakovani-bronezhileti-1375380.html> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]; audio records <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn-lLzkNS0Y> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

⁴⁸ See “Scandalous Record of [the Prime-Minister] Honcharuk Wiretapping”, *ZiK*, January 15, 2020, at: <https://zik.ua/tv/video/233593> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]; and “Video-record of the Altercation Between [the Interior Minister] Avakov and [the Odesa Governor] Saakashvili,” *TSN*, December 16, 2015, at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbj1bzYs7Bs> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

⁴⁹ See, e.g., a highly cynical, vulgar and sexist conversation between two leaders of today’s ruling party The Servant of the People – its head Oleksandr Kornienko and the head of its parliamentary faction David Arakhamia (none of them has resigned since then, as should have been in a normal country): “A ‘Ship Pine’: the Servant’s Leaders Talk on Their Female Colleague”, *Ukrainska Pravda*, June 23, 2020, at: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2020/06/23/7256879/> [accessed on: October 2, 2022]; audio record <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkMOxVYdgS8> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

beginning (or, as they call it, pragmatic). They pursued two interrelated goals – to draw the rent wherever possible (as it was the main goal of their “national” independence) and to keep a delicate balance between the passionate natives who demanded “Europeanization” (that included unacceptable for the ruling elite rule of law), and – the conservative “petite colonizers” (the “orphans of the Białowieża Forest”, in Pal Tamas’ acerbic words), more or less skillfully manipulating both groups.

Envisioning the Ukrainian Reset: In a Way of Conclusion

As I finished the article before the war, I considered the chances to break the vicious circle of oligarchic postcommunism, with its deeply entrenched rent-seeking and wealth-for-power (and vice versa) exchange, rather slim. My only hope was for certain external actors that would help Ukrainian civil society to tip the balance – as it has happened already during a similar stalemate in the Balkans. Only such a breakout, I believed, would effectively facilitate the postcolonial emancipation of the Ukrainian “minoritized majority” from the structural – both social-economic and discursive – dominance of oligarchic “majoritized minority”.⁵⁰

My assumption was largely based on the tenets of modernization theory that viewed such emancipation contingent on the growth and maturing of middle class, *la bourgeoisie*, as the only group that has a vested interest in democracy, constitutionalism, nation building and rule of law. Their project of nation-building should have not necessarily been natives-based and natives-driven. In many cases, we know, it was accomplished by settlers or assimilated natives – like in Ireland, or both Americas, or – well may happen – in Belarus. In any case, the development of a liberal democratic, lawful state is a necessary, though not sufficient condition to accommodate the interests of competing groups.

⁵⁰ This is a paraphrase of Will Kymlicka’s term, from his *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 186. See also Judith Sijstermans, “The Populism and Sub-State Nationalism Nexus in Flanders”, *H-Nationalism*, October 28, 2020, at: <https://networks.h-net.org/node/3911/discussions/6659948/populism-and-sub-state-nationalism-nexus-flanders> [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

The all-out Russian military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and Ukrainians' unexpectedly strong, unified response to it brought about correctives to my past predictions. On the one hand, Ukrainians confirmed something that was observable already in 2014, during a smaller but more unexpected Russian incursion, when the Ukrainian nation did not split, despite the Russian both military and propagandistic pressure. To the contrary, it appeared that Ukrainians are unified much more than before, with a substantial increase of the nationwide support for national independence, self-declared patriotism, readiness to defend their country with arms, pro-Western orientations and approval of more pro-Ukrainian cultural and memory policies. Remarkably, all these changes occurred within all the ethno-linguistic groups, as distinguished by sociologists (Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians, Russian-speaking Ukrainians, and ethnic Russians). Their average attitudes remained different – ethnic Russians, for instance, expressed predictably lower support for Ukraine's independence (73%), than Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians (91%), but this was rather quantitative than qualitative difference that did not stipulate any societal split.⁵¹ Crucially, the average attitudes of each group evolved into the same ("pro-Ukrainian", "pro-Western") direction, proving a rather successful consolidation of political nation.

On the other hand, yet, the war not only delegitimized all things Russian ("Muscovite") as coming from the enemy state but also, paradoxically, legitimized the "native", Ukrainian Russianness inasmuch as most Ukrainian Russian-speakers appeared to be loyal Ukrainian citizens, many of them took arms to defend their country, and some prominent members of the allegedly "pro-Russian" party ("Oppositional Platform for Life", a successor to Yanukovich's Party of Regions) led the local resistance to the invaders – like mayors of Kharkiv, Odesa, Dnipro, Mykolaiv or Kryvyi Rih. The same occurred with the Ukrainian Church of Moscow Patriarchate that condemned the invasion and distanced from their spiritual head in Moscow. The incumbent Ukrainian president, a Russian-speaking Jew from the

⁵¹ Динаміка патріотичних настроїв. Соціологічна група "Рейтинг" (серпень 2019), at: http://ratinggroup.ua/files/ratinggroup/reg_files/rg_patriotyzm_082019.pdf [accessed on: October 2, 2022].

industrial southeast, epitomizes, in a way, all the paradoxes of Ukrainian postcommunist nation-building, when the members of the heavily Russified elite acquired gradually the Ukrainian political identity and appropriated Ukrainian language for public performances, even though retained Russian, in most cases, for personal use.

How these developments would influence the relations between the two major ethno-cultural groups in Ukraine is still difficult to predict. If the oligarchic system remains, the social position of the 'Creole' minority would remain even stronger, legitimized by their participation in the national liberation war. But if Ukraine succeeds with the rule of law, with democracy and economic reforms, the consensual settlement looks quite viable and removal of colonial distortions looks possible. Especially if Ukraine gains the EU perspective and all the assistance and guidance that accompany this way.

In any case, Franz Fanon's book will remain rather topical as it gives Ukrainians two lessons. One of them relates to the full recognition of colonial trauma and of mechanisms of internalization of the negative self-image imposed by the colonizers. And the other one implies the need not only to recognize but also to radically change the underlying social-economic conditions that support the structural dominance of one group over the other. To Fanon's credit, he never stopped at the first, purely cognitive step, but persistently emphasized the need for the second, social-economic:

"As a psychoanalyst, I should help my patient to become conscious of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at a hallucinatory whitening, but also to act in the direction of a change in the *social structure*... If in his [patient's] dreams I establish the expression of an unconscious desire to change color, my objective will not be that of dissuading him from it by advising him to 'keep his place'; on the contrary, my objective, once his motivations have been brought into consciousness, will be to put him in a position to choose action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of the conflict – that is, toward the *social structures*... The effective disalienation of the black man entails an immediate recognition of *social and economic realities*. If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: *a)* primarily, economic; *b)* subsequently, the internalization of this inferi-

ority... What is important is not to educate them [racists], but to teach the Negro not to be the slave of their archetypes.”⁵²

Ukrainians seem to have taken the first step in the right direction but they still need to properly recognize the necessity of the second. ❧

⁵² Fanon, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 35, 100. Italics mine (M.R.).