

Contemporary Problems of Social Change: Polish and Ukrainian Experience

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Identities conflict in Ukraine as a result of post-traditional changes

Introduction

Being multiethnic, Ukrainian state is made up from different cultures and identities. Sociocultural modernization, which is implicative to any society, is aimed at the formation of general civil identity as a resource for development. However, it appears that civil and political reasons are not enough in Ukraine to form necessary social solidarity characteristic to each national-state community.

Consolidation of national-state community based on the civil identity appears to be the main source for development motivation, and dilution of such identity deepens inner social-cultural separations.

Unimplemented aspiration to confirm identities of groups and communities formed outside and beyond the state (membership in which is perceived by individual as significant for supporting his cultural belonging and for his individual self-identification) fuels bursts of political radicalism.

Contradictions between communities representing the bearers of different identities lead to lingering conflicts. The nature of such conflicts cannot be narrowed down only to ‘identities conflict’; they also have social, political-institutional and economic dimensions, but the statement of their special rights and legitimization of their ambitions to be special is reasoned in public discourse by common, different from ‘others’ self-identification landmarks of certain community or group. Aggressive policy of identity of these communities or groups, their demands for social recognition and special legal status as a rule lead to deep sociocultural convulsions.

Dramatic events in Ukraine have actualized theoretic apprehension in conjunction with empiric research of identity phenomenon. Adhering to historical fairness we need to state that for the last decade the international community has experienced “veritable discursive explosion ... around the concept of ‘identity’” as per English sociologist Stuart Hall.¹

¹ Hall Stuart. Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (1997) Ian Randle Publishers; London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2007.

“No other aspect of contemporary life, it seems, attracts the same amount of attention these days from philosophers, social scientists and psychologists. It is not just that ‘identity studies’ are fast becoming a thriving industry in their own right; more than that is happening – one may say that ‘identity’ has now become a prism through which other topical aspects of contemporary life are spotted, grasped and examined”.²

This statement by Z. Bauman, first of all, explains the social need for identity research in Ukrainian society. Secondly, it determines the strategy for scientific search for studying, evaluation and forecasting of modern radical events in Ukraine.

Reasons for identity conflicts in Ukrainian society

Identity as a problem appears in the times of changes, in the situation when there is a need to make alliances by means of new identity, and the need in creation of the new sociocultural collective Self. The transition from traditional society to modern society and then to post-modern society is accompanied by the burst of new identities. In other words, the identity is transforming into a problem, when there is a possibility to choose it.

Post-traditional transformations as a ground for identity conflicts

Identity conflict is connected with value-worldview contradictions caused by social transformations of Ukrainian society (a sociocultural conflict of post-traditionalism as per A. Giddens).³ The ground of identities conflict is value-worldview asymmetries and contradictions driven by economic, sociocultural and political factors.

Post-Soviet transformations of Ukrainian society changed earlier homogenous value-worldview content of the social space (Soviet space) as well as traditionalist status of collective Selves. The results of the monitoring sociological research of the Sociology Institute attached to the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine allow seeing the dynamics of citizens’ acceptance of their “Ukrainianness” into their lifeworld. (See Tabl.1)

Table 1

Who are you in the first place?, %

	1992	2000	2002	2004	2005	2006	2008	2010	2012	2015
A citizen of Ukraine	45.6	41.0	41.0	44.2	54.6	51.6	51.7	51.2	48.0	73.0

Citizens of the new country were forced to accept or not to accept the ‘painful split’ between ‘Russian-Soviet’ ideological paradigm and Ukraine-centrist discourse⁴. The choice of acceptance

² Bauman Z. Identity in the globalizing World. - СПб. 2008

³ Giddens, Anthony (1991) Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age. Cambridge: Polity Press.

⁴ Ryabchuk M. Marginalia from the fields of discourse fights / M. Ryabchuk // Critica. – Issue 1–2. – 2008. – p. 12-15.

appeared to be very complex. For the South-East of Ukraine, taking into consideration the radical regional conflict, this choice appeared to be hypercomplex.

Scientists distinguish three most powerful social communities at the territory of modern Ukraine: Ukrainian, Russian and ‘Soviet’.⁵

Post-Soviet transformation processes in Donetsk province confronted first of all Ukrainian and ‘Soviet’ communities. This antagonism was not accidental. Post-traditional values, aimed at affirming the right of an individual to independently construct his own destiny as well as his own identity, were not accepted in Donbas by the majority of the population. Values of Soviet life appeared to be that construct, which hampered the formation of civil identity amongst the inhabitants of Donbas region. Sociologists register the high level of nostalgia for the Soviet Union in Donbas region (see Table 2).

Table.2

Attitude of the population towards the collapse of the Soviet Union (January 2015), %

	West	Center	South	East	Donbas	Ukraine
Positive	74	60	55	35	12	55
Negative	13	20	32	50	70	29
Indifferent	12	20	14	12	17	16

Researching the identity conflict in Donbas, we can say that the reason for it is existentiality inertia of Soviet values. Identity conflicts reflect acute contradictions based on the deep differences in shared by conflict sides’ collective values: Soviet, post-Soviet, pre-modernist, and modernist.

⁵ Shved D. Paradoxes of post-colonial dimension / D. Shved // Critica. – Issue 5. – 2005. – p. 21–24.

First of all we are speaking about such post-Soviet value as paternalism. Lately, as a result of crisis economic, political and social processes in Ukraine and in Donbas region, the ‘Soviet’ identity started to be represented in the form of ‘Russian’ as the latter gave the hope and the feeling of patronage and security from the strong neighbor state. At that understandable Russian language is also there as well as known and close system of retro-values and symbols.

Historical memory as a reason for identities conflict

One of the main reasons for identities conflict in Ukraine is a conflict of ‘memory models’, antagonistic contradiction of different versions of country’s past. In other words: the availability of two polar versions of historical memory in modern Ukraine is a reason for dramatic events in Ukraine.⁶

In Ukraine Soviet regime for the decades practiced unprecedented mass and systematic policy of social memory loss, mass historical forgetfulness, the manipulation with historical facts.⁷

Ukrainian history is called “the most manipulated history in the world”.⁸

There are mutually exclusive views on historical events in Ukrainian community as well as disastrous division of Ukrainian society into two language-cultural groups with contrasting beliefs regarding the past. Two historical narratives, two histories coexist in one country, and supporters of each group are not ready to find consensus on key issues of national being yet. Ukrainians of Galicia and Volyn cannot consider soldiers of the Red Army to be liberators, as they returned well-remembered by its bloody crimes Soviet occupational regime. At the same time for the majority of the population of the East and South of Ukraine the memory of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ is sacred. For Donbas inhabitants ‘Bandera’s followers are outsiders and will never become insiders’.⁹

We will address the results of the sociological survey conducted by Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation “What unites and disunites Ukrainians – public opinion poll” to illustrate the thesis on historical memory as a reason for identities conflict. This survey was conducted on the brink of 2014-2015 years in the main historical regions of Ukraine. The poll was not conducted in Lugansk province and in Crimea. 4413 respondents were polled. The quota sample was used, which represents the population of allocated regions of Ukraine aged 18 and older according to the provinces, types of settlements, age and gender.

Respondents were offered to answer the question “How do you evaluate the main events in the history of Ukraine?”. The following responses - ‘positively’, ‘negatively’, ‘indifferently’, ‘I do not know anything about it’ - were available to evaluate the historical events (‘positive’ answer was analyzed for two most representative regions for asymmetry measuring): (See Table 3)

	Galicia	Donbas
National-liberation war under the leadership of Hetman Bogdan Khmelnytsky	86 %	65%
Consequences of Pereyaslav Rada (1654), new relations between Ukraine and Moscow kingdom	12%	41%

⁶ Zakharov E. Memories’ conflict // E. Zakharov/ Critica. – Issue 5. – 2007. – p. 17.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Girich I. Historical reasons of our losses and victories / I. Girich. – Lviv: LA “Piramida”, 2011. – 142 p. 4.

⁹ Girich I. Historical reasons of our losses and victories / I. Girich. – Lviv: LA “Piramida”, 2011. – 142 p. 4.

Victory of Ukrainian-Crimean Tatar army against army of Moscow kingdom near Konotop (1659)	60%	25%
Constitution written by P. Orlyk (1710)	73%	30%
Victory over French army, headed by Napoleon in French-Russian war of 1812	19%	79%
Creation of Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in Kharkiv in 1917	18%	66%
Creation of OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) in 1929	89%	6%
Creation of Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA) in 1942	92%	8%
Victory of the USSR in the war of 1941-45 against the Third Reich	72%	97%
Collapse of the Soviet Union	88%	12%
Proclamation of the Independence of Ukraine	97%	40%

The biggest distance in evaluation of historical events belongs to the creation of Ukrainian Insurgent Army in 1942 and makes up 84%. The second place is possessed by creation of OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) in 1929 and makes up 83% difference.

Population of Donbas consists mainly of resettlers, who moved to this territory in 1930s. Their descendants are that part of Donbas, whose historical memory falls within the Soviet times. These people have problems with their identification as citizens of Ukraine. The state is a hostage of complex circumstances in the search of unbiased, rational view on the past, deprived of the emotionally burdened attributes, such as ‘traitors’, ‘renegades’, ‘collaborationists’, etc.

Judging from strong belief that the nation is people having one collective memory about their past, Ukrainian scientist I. Girich is quite categorical in his conclusions: the vast majority of the population of the East and the South of our country are ‘political Russians’ and these regions remain being ‘mentally Russian space’.¹⁰

The population of Ukraine has a huge problem: people need to come to the mutual acknowledgement and understanding that ‘theirs’ is also ‘ours’ and vice versa.

The forecast of identities conflict resolution

Based on the results of the sociologic research we can speak about the positive resolution of identities conflict in Ukraine. Comparative analysis of civil identity of the population of all regions of Ukraine allows noticing the dominance of the answers ‘I am a citizen of Ukraine’ (see Table 4).

Identification with Ukrainian citizenship dominates in all regions (January 2015)

	West	Center	South	East	Donbas	Ukraine
An inhabitant of my village/town/city	10	7	17	18	17	12
An inhabitant of my region	6	2	8	10	13	7
A citizen of Ukraine	78	88	66	64	50	73
A representative of my ethnos	2	0	3	2	1	1
A citizen of the USSR	0	1	3	3	10	3
A citizen of Europe	1	1	0	2	0	1
A citizen of the world	1	0	1	2	7	2
Other	1	0	0	0	2	1

The number of respondents preferring their region to remain the part of Ukraine is higher than the number of separatism supporters. Respondents were asked a question “Which status should be obtained by the region you currently reside in?” Donbas data are as follows:

Remain a part of Ukraine, with the same rights as before	3%
Remain a part of Ukraine, but with more autonomy	27%
Become autonomous part of federative Ukraine	30%
Secede from Ukraine and become an independent state	20%
Secede from Ukraine and become a part of another country	15%

As we can see, 60% of the population of Donbas in different formats is ready to remain a part of Ukraine. As to separatist motivations, 35% of Donbas population does not see their future in Ukraine. This figure is not small, but nevertheless the number of those ready to identify themselves with Ukraine is almost two times bigger.

We’ve analyzed the answers of respondents to the question “What will be the main factor to unite Ukraine?” to forecast the situation development in Donbas. The analysis of Donbas respondents’ answers shows that the most frequent responses are:

33% - Fight against nationalist ideology

33% - Improvement of socio-economic conditions

The last condition can be fulfilled as it is among the interests of all citizens of Ukraine. In regard to the nationalist ideology the new question arises: what should be compromised by all citizens of Ukraine?

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