



Models of Cultural and Civilizational Identification among Residents of Russian and Ukrainian Border Regions

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Abstract

The paper analyses the models of cultural and civilizational identification among the residents of Russian and Ukrainian border regions formed under the crisis in Russia-Ukraine relations. The cultural and civilizational identity is understood here as an open or latent identification of an individual or a group of individuals with a socio-cultural matrix, or the historically developed complex of cultural patterns (frames) which entails typification of the value systems, social practices and individual life trajectories. The historically developed socio-cultural community of the border-regions residents illustrates the influence of ideological and political factors on the emerged diversity of cultural and civilizational identities. The model of cultural and civilizational identification prevalent among the residents of the Russian border regions is autonomous, with the axiological and institutional components of the national culture having enough power and attraction to become the basis for integration and socialization. The "alien" culture is frequently regarded as a threat for the cultural and civilizational originality. The model of cultural and civilizational identification, which is currently dominant in the Ukrainian border regions, is eclectic, with the significant objects searched for beyond the national culture, and the culture has no internal integrity. In this sense, the border regions of Ukraine differ from the cultural core, where the autonomous model of cultural and civilizational identification has a confrontational nature and is based on the absence of a common civilizational identity with Russia.

Keywords: Cultural and civilizational identity; Border regions; Cultural and civilizational identification models; Russia-Ukraine relations crisis

Introduction

For a long time, the territory of modern Russia-Ukraine border regions has been a zone of intensive ethnic, socio-cultural and political bonds. As a result, they have formed a limitrophe with an elaborated communication system and a complex of common identifiers (dialects, place names, etc.) which were sometimes more important than the national political self-determination. Prior to the crisis in Russia-Ukraine relations in 2013-2015, that had been the case with the border regions. The majority of the residents viewed the state border as an annoying, yet temporary, limitation, and the relations with the neighbor country were more intensive and comprehensive than contacts with other regions within the state. The most widespread types of communication were family contacts, as well as cooperation in the fields of education, economy and tourism.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict not only brought to the fore the political contradictions between the states, but it became a trigger for cultural and civilizational demarcation which started at the turn of the 1980s-1990s and was embodied in the slogan "Ukraine is not Russia" [1].

Method

A cultural and civilizational identity represents one of many forms of social identities, yet it has a number of peculiar features. The specific cultural environment is the core of any society. A special place in the complex of cultural patterns, or, according to T. Parsons, in "the cultural system of action", is held by stable constructs formed in the course of the historical development of the society under the influence of the system-forming factors. Such factors have usually two and more levels. The first level comprises the natural/climatic, geopolitical, linguistic, demographic and other factors which determine the fundamental specificity of certain communities and their relations with the surroundings. The second level constitutes a group of factors forming the political, axiological and religious idiosyncrasy of the said community. Over time, such idiosyncrasy evolves into the "cultural matrix" of the community.

The cultural and civilizational identity is understood here as an open or latent identification of an individual or a group of individuals with a certain socio-cultural matrix, or the historically developed set of cultural patterns (frames). Such identification leads to the typification of axiological systems, social practices and individual life trajectories. Therefore, the level of individual or group cultural and civilizational identification: 1) is an empirically proven fact; 2) manifests itself in the form of a frame of the individual or group consciousness; 3) is embodied in social practices. Under the collapse of social and political institutions the cultural and civilizational identification safeguards the social and psychological stability of individuals and groups [2].

The cultural and civilizational identification is built on a set of orientations concerning the national culture as a whole, the axiological system, ideology, religious, social and political institutions and symbols.

The cultural and civilizational identification works through the processes of self-attribution or self-identification of an individual or a group of individuals with cultural values, institutions and symbols and in certain cases through the distancing and open rejection of similar objects of another origin. As a rule, the crucial for identification values, institutions and symbols come from the national and cultural environment which is native for the individual or the group and whose contemporary elements are based on the long-lasting tradition. This is the classic model of the cultural and civilizational identification which can be called autonomous. In this model, the axiological and institutional components of the national culture have enough power and attraction to become the basis for socialization. Yet, depending of the specific situation, the autonomous model can become both non-confrontational and confrontational, or conflict-oriented.

At the same time, certain objects, though external to the autochthonal national and cultural environment, can for some reasons become equally or even more appropriate for self-identification. At this point, values, institutions and symbols of a different cultural and civilizational origin can be relatively uncontroversial and even, to a certain degree, complementary.

The model, where autochthonal and external in their cultural and civilizational origin objects co-exist and complement one another, can be named synthetic. If these objects are controversial in their contents, but equally attractive for an individual or a group, they lead to the axiological dissonance. This case is an example of the eclectic model of the cultural and civilizational identification (a case which Lev Gumilev called a chimera).

Finally, external in their cultural and civilizational origin objects can fully substitute the native values and institutions of the national culture. It is the extreme possibility, and such model can be named inverse.

Obviously, the above models are not necessarily actualized in their pure form. It is often difficult to determine the cultural and civilizational origin of the specific value or institution and the degree of their specificity/universality. Globalization processes add up to the dissolution of national cultures. On

the one hand, there exists global expansion of cultural patterns, originated from the European and North American (Western Christian) culture. On the other hand, these patterns tend to lose their cultural specificity and are unified under the influence of the market economy and the mass consumption. At this point, the societies of the Western Christian culture witness the processes of social automation and axiological differentiation. Besides, they undergo significant migration pressure from the societies which belong to other cultural and civilizational types. Moreover, the migrant groups also see the similar processes of the identity dissolution which, according to D. Bhugra and M.A. Becker, entail the rise of mental diseases [3].

As a result, the modern societies lose their cultural and civilizational solidity and integrity. Firstly, it is due to the development of cultural and civilizational pluralism (multiculturalism). Secondly, in certain cases, the socio-cultural matrices cease to form the basis for the behavioral frames for a number of participants. They stop seeing the cultural and civilizational identity as important, though it can penetrate certain patterns of social behavior. We find it dubious that "the solution for the problem of identity in the realms of the professional life, socio-cultural dynamics, political relations etc. can be derived from the solution of the problem of the civilizational identity" [4].

Besides, we should not overlook the virtualization, or the creation of the global information space, which is an integral part of globalization and which dismantles the problem of socio-cultural and political borders. "Today the freedom to move both physically, socially and virtually, to cross geographical boundaries and cultural borders has changed the "practices" of the human "choice" of themselves and their attitude to events, processes, and institutions" [5]. Therefore, "the configuration of the identity is not constant, but it is subject to changes depending on many factors" [6]. At the same time, the impact of the globalization processes on the cultural and civilizational identity should not be regarded as fully destructive. To a great extent, as noted by J. Tomlinson, the cultural identity is not only the victim of globalization, but also its product and consequence [7].

This is totally true for the processes of cultural and civilizational identification in Russia and Ukraine, including their border regions. The specificity of the current state of the Russia-Ukraine relations and the global state of affairs, characterized by the increased confrontation gives a natural push for actualization of the autonomous identification model, frequently, in its confrontational form.

Results

Based on the sociological data, including the results of an opinion poll conducted in eight Russian and Ukrainian border regions in 2015 (the research project "Study of processes of cultural and civilizational identities formation in border regions of Russia and Ukraine", N=1,000 respondents, headed by Prof. V.P. Babintsev), this paper endeavors to depict the major models of cultural and civilizational identification of the

residents of Russian and Ukrainian border regions. The processes of socio-cultural disintegration in these regions, where the cross-border relations have been traditionally intensive, are the most vivid and help reveal the main trends of the Russia-Ukraine relations.

The “us” vs. “them”, or “allies” vs. “foes”, dichotomy is obviously one of the most archaic forms of the society categorization. Still, it remains important, which is evident from the high level of confrontation in international, inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations. The collective consciousness of Russians is another proof of this statement. According to a monitoring research by the Levada-Center, the share of Russians confident in the presence of foes of Russia has raised from 65% in 1999 to 80% in 2015 with the peak value of 84% in 2014. The same research shows that the share of Russians who consider the major Western states (the USA, Germany, Great Britain, Japan etc.) to be “the enemies of Russia who try to solve their problems at its expense and when occasion offers inflict harm to its interests”, has increased from 44% in 2010 to 75% in 2015 with the peak of 79% in 2014. The share of the advocates of the opposite position, according to which these states are “the partners of Russia sharing the same interests (for example, in the war against crime and terrorism, in ecological issues, in scientific, cultural and economic advancement)” has fallen within the same period from 44% to 17%, and as low as 8% in 2014 [8]. Therefore, the consciousness of the majority of Russians has recently witnessed a distinct demarcation between their native country and most of the outer world.

Yet, the self-identification has not been totally negative or reduced to the search for enemies. More distinct self-positioning of Russia in the world has evidently become in the Russian mass consciousness the source of patriotic feelings and pride for their state, though not always rational. A monitoring research by the Levada-Center shows that during the last two years the share of Russians who consider Russia to be better than most other states has significantly increased (64% in October 2014 vs. 48% in October 2012 vs. 36% in June 1996). The number of citizens proud to live in Russia has also increased. While in October 2013 (just before the crisis) 70% of the respondents confessed to be proud of living there, in October 2014 this number reached 86% [9]. Obviously, this trend of the mass consciousness is attributed to the foreign policy of the Russian government, for instance, to their willingness to confront the USA and the European Union.

A proof of the ethno-cultural demarcation between Russians and Ukrainians in the Russian mass consciousness is the Russians’ opinions about the difference between the national characters of the two nations, recorded by sociologists of the Levada-Center in August-September 2014. These opinions and observations fully reflect the ethnical auto- and hetero-stereotypes (regarding the Ukrainian people) present in the consciousness of Russians (they are actually ethnical Russians, whose group makes up 77% of the population according to the Russian Census – 2010, 2010). The poll shows, firstly, the extent of the socio-cultural gap between Russians and Ukrainians, as imagined by Russians, and,

secondly, the degree to which the stereotypical thinking tends to attribute positive traits of the national character to the own nation and negative – to the alien, though ‘fraternal’ people (in the opinion of the majority). We can observe a certain offense, a grudge against Ukraine’s drift away from the “Russian World” towards the “European values” and a conviction that the Ukrainian economy is fully dependent on Russian resources and consumers [10,11].

In its turn, the ongoing, though not at a stable pace, political and socio-cultural drift of Ukraine from Russia in the post-Soviet period has built the concept of originality and self-sufficiency of Ukraine in the minds of the majority of Ukrainians. Besides, which is even more crucial for understanding of the processes of Ukrainians’ self-identification, a significant share of them have gained the opinion that such originality can flourish only under full autonomy from Russia. It would be an oversimplification to say that the aggravation of the attitude of Ukrainians towards Russian citizens is caused only by the political events of the past two years. Even before this, Russia had been considered as a threat by many Ukrainians. For instance, according to the results of a telephone poll, conducted by the Razumkov Center in the major cities of Ukraine in 2009, the share of the respondents in Kiev and Lvov, who think that Ukraine is threatened by Russia, reached correspondingly 29.2% and 38.5%. Yet, farther to the East, this share decreases, and ultimately drops to 5.2% among Donetsk dwellers [12].

Therefore, while elaborating models of cultural and civilizational identity of the residents of Russian and Ukrainian border regions, it is necessary to keep in mind the significant antagonism in their relations as a compensatory mechanism which allows overcoming the lack of positive endogenous factors of identification.

Obviously, the confrontational nature of the cultural and civilizational identity, dominant in the Russian society in the recent years, molded the mass consciousness of the residents of the Russian border regions.

Our research goes in line with the above trend. The presence of a significant degree of antagonism in the cultural and civilizational identity is proved by a great number of negative traits attributed to the neighbors’ national character and serving to accentuate own positive characteristics. Russians are more willing to attribute negative traits to their neighbors comparing to Ukrainians, which proves the assertion that this phenomenon of the mass consciousness has a compensatory nature helping overcome the feeling of guilt. Among Russians, the share of those speaking of not a single positive trait in the Ukrainian national character reached 36.2%. The corresponding share of Ukrainians evaluating the “representatives of the Russian culture” was significantly lower – 17.6% (Table 1).

Discussion

The results of our research reveal the basic set of values underlying the self-identification of the border-zone residents. The first group is formed by the values defining the national

culture and manifested as such in the mass consciousness. This category comprises characteristics, noted by 30% and more of the respondents. The second group of values is the regulatory values underlying the social behavior. This group comprises the values which have gained the highest scores (9 and 10 points out of 10 among no less than 40% of the respondents).

The residents of the Russian border regions see the Russian national culture as built around three positive traits “industriousness – generosity – friendliness” (mentioned correspondingly by 39.4% - 36.4% - 38.2% of the respondents), and a high frequency of one negative trait – laziness (39.4%). These traits can be considered the core of the reflected Russian national culture.

The basic regulatory values in the collective consciousness of the residents of Russian border regions include: safety (57.4% of the respondents mentioned its high importance, giving it 9 or 10 points), personal success (45.2%), and trust to people (40.4%).

For the residents of Ukrainian border regions, the top regulatory value was safety (53.2%) – which was the only value mentioned by over 40% of the respondents.

Table 1: Dominating value

Value	Russia	Ukraine
Safety	57.4% - 1	53.2% - 1
Personal success	45.2% - 2	33.8% - 2
Trust to people	40.4% - 3	31.8% - 4
Enjoyment of life	3.,8% - 4(5)	26.0% - 7
Independence, initiative	36.8% - 4(5)	29.8% - 5(6)
Benevolence, helpfulness	36.4% - 6	33.0% - 3
Desire for change	33.6% - 7(8)	29.8% - 5(6)
Tradition, preservation of the usual way of life	34.4% - 7(8)	24.2% - 8
Wealth	34.2% - 9	22.2% - 9
Risk, competition	26.2% - 10	20.0% - 10
Community affiliation, observance of common norms	27.6% - 11	17.8% - 12
Power	27.2% - 12	19.0% - 11

Thus, we can speak of a significant similarity between the cultural and civilizational identities of the residents of Russian and Ukrainian border regions in terms of values, as both groups have similar values hierarchy. Still, the mass consciousness of the Ukrainian citizens can be described as rather disorganized and frustrated, having lost its traditionalistic ideals without having formed a set of values inherent to a modern society.

The split in the self-identification of the residents of Russian and Ukrainian border regions is also accentuated by a rather significant difference in the image of their state as an object of

pride. While the share of the Russian respondents who are proud of their country reaches 76.6% (the opposite opinion is shared by 8.4%), the corresponding shares of Ukrainians are 63.8% and 25.0%.

As is was mentioned above, the all-national identity in Ukraine is by far more complicated due to constantly actualized socio-cultural (and currently geopolitical) splits. “The strive for autonomy of a part of the Ukrainian society still has traits not of a conscious political ambition to achieve certain aims with the help of autonomous power, but of the self-protective reaction to the failure to solve the problems of their cultural and civilizational self-identification” [13].

According to the Institute of Sociology of NAS of Ukraine, in 1992-2013 the level of the all-national identity did not exceed 54.6%. That peak was likely to be a reaction to the euphoria after the “Orange revolution”, when the people, represented by the nationalistic and pro-Western counter-elite, defeated the party in power. At that period the ratio of the respondents with a regional or local identity totaled 33.9%. In 2013, the share of the respondents with the all-national general civil identity increased to 36.4% [14]. According to the Razumkov Center, in 2012 the question “It is recently said that the Ukrainian society is split into two almost antagonistic parts according to the regional distribution. Do you think that such split in the society exists?” divided the respondents into two almost equal groups with 41.9% of them acknowledging such split and 42% not believing in its existence. The highest number of the respondents confirming the split between regions (59.5%) was recorded in the Southern part of Ukraine (including the Crimea) “It is recently said that the Ukrainian society is split into two almost antagonistic parts according to the regional distribution. Do you think that such split in the society exists? (regional distribution)”, 2012). At the same time, even in January 2014 the idea of federalization of Ukraine was opposed by the vast majority of the respondents: 61.4% vs. 15.8% (Razumkov Center). A relatively small share of the respondents supported the secession of their region and gaining independence (4.5%) or accession to another state (5.5%). Moreover, the corresponding shares in the Southern and Eastern regions were also not critical. In the South, the idea of creation of an independent state was supported by 12.7% of the respondents, and the accession to another state – by 13.1%. The corresponding shares of the respondents in the East reached 4.7% and 8.6% (“Attitudes of the population of Ukraine towards different variants of the territorial division: The results of the sociological research”, 2013) [15].

Nevertheless, the crisis of 2013-2014 changed the situation drastically, having influenced, specifically, the factors of the cultural and civilizational identification and reinforcing its political component. For the Ukrainian society, the conflict with Russia became, on the one hand, a factor of consolidation around the images, values and institutions of the ‘independent Ukraine’ and on the other hand, it strengthened the centrifugal forces in the mass consciousness. The latter trend was particularly prominent in the minds of the residents of the border regions of Ukraine which remained at the periphery of the axiological core cultivated by the Ukrainian government.

The residents of Ukrainian border regions have extremely diverse cultural and civilizational identities. For instance, the question "With which cultural tradition do you associate yourself?" produced a high degree of dispersion in answers. Only 15.8% of the respondents associate themselves with the Ukrainian culture, and 11.8 – with the Russian one. The cultural and civilizational identity of other respondents transcends the national boundaries but remains highly differentiated. Comparing to the residents of Ukrainian border regions, the Russian population of the border zone is almost solid in its cultural and civilizational identity with relatively small inclusion of other substrata. 70.8% of the respondents declared their belonging to the Russian culture, which proves the high degree of both cultural and civilizational and national and state identity. The second top cultural self-identification is "global", or, in our terms, "cosmopolitan" (9.42%). Almost the same share of the respondents (8.8%) associate themselves with the European culture. The share of the cognitively incompetent respondents (8.6%) is slightly smaller than that of the Ukrainian respondents, which also testifies to a larger extent of cultural integration among the residents of the Russian border regions comparing to their Ukrainian neighbors.

The interpretation of the complex of these rather ambiguous and sometimes contradicting empirical data obtained by our research and by national monitoring surveys in Russia and Ukraine in terms of the models of cultural and civilizational identification gives grounds to certain conclusions.

First of all, we observe a certain similarity in the axiological portrait of the residents of Russian and Ukrainian border regions. It testifies to the existence of a common cultural and civilizational matrix. In the case with Russians, this matrix is likely to remain more authentic thanks to the conservative policy of the last decade and preservation (recreation) of the common ideologemes, patterns and symbols (Empire, paternalism, Great Past etc.). On the contrary, in the recent decades, the mass consciousness of Ukrainians underwent the processes of differentiation and fragmentation which deepened the existing cultural splits.

Conclusions

Nowadays the prevailing model of cultural and civilizational identification in Ukraine-Russia border regions is eclectic, characterized by the fact that the significant objects are searched beyond the national culture, and the culture itself is not intrinsically solid. The relatively common autonomous model is realized predominantly in its confrontational variant. Moreover, contrary to Russia, in Ukraine this variant was dominant from the beginning and was not triggered by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The inverse model is more widespread in Ukraine than in Russia and has an obvious anomic reason: the lack of formed integrated axiological system and the disappointment in the ideologemes imposed by the national political elites.

At present there exists a certain misbalance in the socio-cultural space of the border regions in both states. In Russian regions, which are adjacent to Ukraine, the prevailing orientation is that towards cultural and civilizational (and political) self-sufficiency [16,17]. The Ukrainian regions witness fragmentation of the mass expectations and an evident loss of the national identity. This hampers the proper self-presentation of the Ukrainian and Russian regions as mutually interested subjects with sovereign resources. Such misbalance significantly impairs the renewal of comprehensive relations between the border regions.

Gratitude

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