"My Grandparents Are Separatists": How Young Ukrainians Perceive Their National Community[1]

Lina Klymenko
Tampere University, Finland

Abstract: Based on focus group discussions with young people in Ukraine, this article analyzes how young Ukrainians conceptualize their national community. The understanding of nationalism in the study rests upon the concept of a discursive formation of a nation. In line with this concept, nationalism is viewed as a certain mode of discourse that reflects citizens' interpretations of who constitutes a nation. The analysis of the focus group discussions reveals how young Ukrainians perceive the Ukrainian nation in terms of a community with a specific socio-political order, culture, and mentality.

Keywords: nationalism, discourse, focus groups, youth, Ukraine.

INTRODUCTION

> Participant II-A: I would say that my grandparents are not patriots; you could even call them—as my mother says—separatists. But we can't do anything, they are like they are.
>
> Moderator: Separatists? What does that mean?
>
> Participant II-A: I said it this way because I didn't know how to express myself. They were born in the Soviet Union, and they want to live like they did in the Soviet Union; they want to live in Russia. But we, the young generation, are different. Honestly, I want to live in Ukraine.[2]

This quote from a focus group discussion with young people in Ukraine in 2014-15 exemplifies how a young Ukrainian defines her national identity. The example shows that for this young person the most defining feature of her sense of belonging to the Ukrainian nation is loyalty to the Ukrainian nation-state, which clearly contrasts with her grandparents' conception of national belonging. In fact, given the changes that occurred in Ukrainian society in the aftermath of the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and Russia's support for the separatist forces in

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[2] All translations in this study are my own.

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eastern Ukrainian Donbas, some recent studies have indicated that Ukrainians have significantly altered their understanding of what constitutes the Ukrainian nation or, in other words, what it means to be Ukrainian (Kulyk, "National Identity"; Kulyk, "Shedding Russianness"; Onuch and Hale; Onuch et al.; Pop-Eleches and Robertson; Sasse and Lackner). This has been visible in people's changed attitudes toward the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian statehood, and Ukraine's relations with Russia; such attitudes vary with respect to regional, ethnic, or linguistic background.

To supplement previous studies, this article offers a more nuanced understanding of what Ukrainian citizens think of their national identity in the above-mentioned context. The article focuses on young people as a specific generation of Ukrainian society. It complements the recent studies on young people's attitudes toward aspects of their daily life (Röthig), and their conceptions of Ukraine's eastern border (Fournier). However, this work concentrates specifically on young peoples' perceptions of their national community and their place therein. The study accords the young people that were born in independent Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union an important role in the social and political changes in the country, and acknowledges that their political attitudes and conceptions of the Ukrainian nation differ significantly from those of their grandparents' generation, a generation socialized in the Soviet Union.

Given the quantitative (or mixed methods) research design of previous studies on Ukrainian national identity, this work employs a focus group research method. In contrast to previous studies that work with predefined identity categories chosen by the interviewees, this method allows research participants to define themes that are salient to them. In qualitative data collection and analysis, a focus group discussion reflects how people think or feel about a specific issue. The exploratory nature of focus groups can identify thematic patterns in participants' conceptions that contribute meaning to the studied phenomenon. Following the interpretive qualitative research tradition, focus groups have recently been used as a self-sustained research method (Barbour; Morgan). In addition to the thematic analysis, an analysis of the interaction between research participants within the focus group allows researchers to trace how these themes emerge and how they are negotiated. The focus group can facilitate the exploration of views and opinions that are less accessible in a one-to-one interview. It is essential to follow how the participants of a focus group interact as they (dis)agree, misunderstand, question or try to persuade each other (Kitzinger; Smithson).

In contrast to previous studies on Ukrainians' conceptions of Ukrainian nationhood, this study is grounded in constructivist, or what Umut Özkirimli calls "new approaches to nationalism," namely, approaches that emphasize the role of culture in defining nationalism (169-219). In this context, culture

is regarded not as a static notion, but as a concept that is constantly redefined and reinterpreted by policy-makers and the ordinary people that make up a national community. In this way, culture is connected to social fragmentation, generational change, and power hierarchies (Özkirimli 169). The concepts of banal, feminist, post-colonial, discursive, and groupist nationalism fall under these approaches (Anderson; Billig; Brubaker; Calhoun; Yuval-Davis; Chatterjee; Özkirimli 169-219), and this work rests on the concept of a discursive formation of a nation that emphasizes the interpretive approach toward the study of nationalism.

Nation As a Discursive Formation

In his work on the theories of nationalism, Özkirimli proposes defining nationalism as "'a discourse,' a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world, a frame of reference that helps us make sense of and structure the reality that surrounds us" (206). He argues that this definition of nationalism does not deny the existence of a certain nation, but rather aims at highlighting the role of people's interpretations in defining a nation. Özkirimli proposes three interrelated results of nationalism discourse. First, it divides the world between "us" and "them" by emphasizing the fixed identity of each group. It prioritizes loyalty to the nation and presents the nation as the source of political legitimacy. Second, it recognizes that a nation's historical development is often used by policy-makers and the population to legitimize political actions. Third, it involves the construction of a common territory, producing images of "home." One should not forget, however, that the discourse of nationalism is also of a contingent nature, since it emerges through a dynamic process of negotiation in a community that is diverse along ethnic, cultural, class, gender, or sexuality lines (Özkirimli 205-17).

For Alan Finlayson, who wrote on ideology and discourse, nationalism can be understood as the discursive articulation of a social formation, that is, as a product of a specific political and social practice. In other words, nationalism is a form of ideological discourse that reflects a discursive construction of a national community and also a system of meaning. Nationalism discourse is often centred on one particular nation and its characteristics, namely on who is a member of a national community and in what way is a nation presented as a unique formation. These claims are often used to legitimize national self-determination. The content of the nationalism discourse prescribes to the member of a nation certain rules and behaviours, according to which a person can be recognized as a "good" member of the national community. Ultimately, Finlayson argues that nationalism is a dynamic and contested process involving constant

(re)articulation of what it means to be a nation and who are its authentic representatives.

Craig Calhoun defines nationalism as a discursive formation, and a particular way of speaking or acting in reference to a nation. In Calhoun's opinion, nations should be defined by the claims that people make about them. A certain level of solidarity among a group of people is necessary for a community to be recognized as "national." Thus, the way people think about their nation plays a crucial role in how others perceive it. Calhoun points out certain characteristics that are often associated with a nation: the boundaries of the population; the notion that the living space is an integral unit; the area's sovereignty; a national legitimacy as viewed by the population; a popular perception of collective affairs; the area's culture, language, shared beliefs, values, and habitual practices; a shared history, a common descent, or racial characteristics; and a special relationship to a certain territory. At the same time, however, Calhoun emphasizes that there is no perfect list of a nation's characteristics: what emerges is a pattern that defines a nation, and this pattern varies in detail from nation to nation. Nations cannot be defined in terms of whether they are actually sovereign or have sharp boundaries; they are defined in terms of the claims that people make about them and how they mobilize their populations to claim a collective identity (Calhoun 1-8).

In an interpretive/constructivist approach to the analysis of national identity, emphasis is placed on the subjective, cognitive, and interpretive nature of nationalism. The constructivist definition of nationalism argues that nations cannot be defined in terms of objective criteria, but only in terms of people's conceptions or claims about their national community. By looking at how national categories are identified and negotiated among policy-makers and ordinary citizens, this approach shows the multiplicity of national ideas that are present in a society, and the controversies that arise from the diversity of national concepts. Therefore, this approach to the study of nationalism postulates that in-groups and out-groups of the national community can be classified and declassified at any time in the context of political and social change in the country, and the criteria according to which a nation can be defined (on the basis of a common territory, history, language, race, beliefs, and so forth) vary accordingly.

Defining the Ukrainian Nation

This article explores the popular perceptions of the Ukrainian national community, based on focus group discussions with young people (18-22 years old) who, at the time of data collection (September 2014 and April 2015), were students of various institutions of higher education, and

residents of Poltava in central Ukraine (see Table 1). A total of 12 participants were recruited through the author's personal network. The young people identified themselves as Ukrainian citizens and ethnic Ukrainians. They were originally from different oblasts in Ukraine but moved to Poltava during their studies.

Table 1. Focus group characteristics.

Characteristics	Group I	Group II	Group III
size of group	4 persons	3 persons	5 persons
gender	1× female 3× male	female	3× female 2× male
age	18-21	18-19	20-22
occupation	student	student	student
citizenship	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Ukrainian
ethnicity ("*natsional'nist'*")	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Ukrainian
ethnicity of parents	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Ukrainian
place of residence	Poltava	Poltava	Poltava
place of birth	Chernihiv Kherson Ternopil Poltava	Mykolaiv Luhansk Poltava	Poltava
native language ("*ridna mova*")	3× Ukrainian 1× no answer	1× Ukrainian 2× no answer	4× Ukrainian 1× no answer
religion	Orthodox	2× Orthodox 1× non-believer ("*neviruiuchyi/a*")	Orthodox

The questions posed to the young people in the focus group aimed to elicit their conceptions of the Ukrainian nation, referring to various dimensions of national identity, such as language, culture, gender, and religion. Although these categories were borrowed from previous studies of national identity in various countries, it was expected that the young people in Ukraine would fill these categories with their own meanings (Wodak et al.; Purdie and Wilss). Moreover, the semi-structured topic guide allowed the research participants to devise their own categories. The anonymized audio-recorded discussions were then analyzed through intra-group and inter-group comparison and through the coding of thematic categories and

subcategories that emerged in the data and which were relevant to the research question. Additionally, attention was paid to the exploration of group dynamics, that is, to how the essence of what it meant to be Ukrainian was negotiated by the research participants. The students also had to complete short questionnaires where they indicated their basic demographic data (such as age, place of birth, citizenship, ethnicity, native language, religion), then answer questions regarding what being Ukrainian meant to them (multiple answers were possible) (see Table 2). The young people's answers to the questionnaire served as background information regarding focus group participants.

National Politics

Participants of the focus groups perceived the Ukrainian nation as a socio-political community of people—a community with a strong social fragmentation, where strict boundaries were drawn between lower and higher classes of society, rich and poor, the elderly and the young. The ruling political elite was associated with business people, governmental functionaries, and priests. For example, the students in Group III distrusted each of the previous Ukrainian presidents and complained about the continuity, from the early 1990s to the present, of the country's political elite, citing that they had been forced to elect the same people to the Ukrainian parliament again and again. The young people in Group III further lamented the enrichment of the Ukrainian political elite through the privatization affairs that took place in the early 1990s, leaving a majority of the Ukrainian population poor, while the students in Group I placed Ukrainian oligarchs in particular in opposition to ordinary Ukrainians. The research participants additionally pointed to the self-enrichment of members of the Ukrainian parliament, and their lack of accountability to the electorate. As a student in Group I put it: "We usually choose bad from among the worst."

The students in Group III also mentioned examples of priests riding in expensive cars and building luxury villas. They stated that the church in Ukraine often acts as a commercial organization in the sense that it often boosts its wealth by selling services such as providing candles, decorative crosses, or scarfs for women to cover their heads when entering the church. This is how the students in Group III articulated their views on the Ukrainian political establishment:

> Moderator: What problems do Ukrainians face today?
>
> Participant III-A: The political leadership ("*vlada*" in the language of the participants).

Participant III-B: The roads.

Participant III-C: As we say: fools and roads.

Participant III-B: This is what I'm saying, the political leadership.

Participant III-A: How does the saying go: A fish rots from the head down?

Moderator: And what problems are there with the political leadership?

Participant III-C: They don't do anything, they don't work.

Participant III-D: They don't serve the interests of the people who chose them.

Participant III-B: They have their own interests.

Participant III-D: There are some groups that separate Ukraine into spheres of influence to support their business and interests.

The students contrasted the political elite of the country with the ordinary people ("*prostyi narod*" in the language of the participants), who they felt lived in poor conditions for the most part. The students in Group III were primarily concerned about the elderly; they noted that the elderly have to pay high prices for gas to heat their apartments that cannot be covered by their pensions. The students also claimed that there were some differences in the political orientations of the younger and older generations in Ukraine, and confirmed this by citing examples of disagreements they had had with their grandparents. The students in Group I explained that the problem concerned the different ways in which elderly and young people viewed politics in Ukraine today. For example, the older generation was born in the Soviet Union and associated the Soviet times with free apartments given to Soviet citizens by the state, low prices on consumer goods, and free education; but the students argued that they had not lived in that era and did not really want to experience it.

However, the students also lamented that it was the elderly generation that often defined the politics in Ukraine. For example, the students in Group III explained that because the elderly are very poor and subsist on small pensions, they are often inclined to support corrupt populist politicians who promise during election campaigns to raise their pensions. In this group, the students also saw the elderly as being co-responsible for the outbreak of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, as they observed that it was mostly elderly grandmothers ("*babushky*" in the language of the participants who all spoke "*surzhyk,*" a sociolect mixture of Ukrainian and Russian) that supported the illegitimate referendum on the legitimacy of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DNR). The students noted that the elderly ladies rallied in the city of Donetsk, shouting that they wanted to die in Russia, and waving separatist flags. Given this context, a dispute broke out in Group III about the extent to which the elderly should have voting rights. One student was particularly keen on stripping the elderly of their voting rights, basing

her argument on the understanding that elderly people do not grasp the nature of Ukrainian politics, and as such should not determine the future of the younger generation. The other students in the group strongly objected to her views, contending that old age does not imply that the older generation does not have an understanding of the political processes of the country, that voting is a fundamental right, and that the elderly should be allowed to voice their political positions in the interests of their grandchildren. The following excerpt illustrates the debate that took place in Group III:

> Participant III-C: I noticed how it was mostly elderly grandmothers that turned out to vote. For them, it was an opportunity to see and be seen.
>
> Participant III-B: Yes, they usually watch TV and then discuss things while sitting together outside in front of their houses.
>
> Participant III-A: But we don't have any grounds for forbidding them from doing this.
>
> Participant III-C: Indeed, we don't.
>
> Participant III-A: But why should a grandmother not have the right to vote? She watches TV, but so do you.
>
> Participant III-D: A grandmother has the right to her own opinion.
>
> Participant III-A: You can't forbid her to vote.
>
> Participant III-B: But she has already lived her life and earned her pension.
>
> Participant III-A: So, what? Should we bury her alive?

Despite the perceived poor living conditions of the Ukrainian population, the students saw civil society as playing a major role in regard to the political and social life of the country. According to the young people, this was particularly evident during the Euromaidan Revolution and the continuing support for the government's military operations in the east of the country (called the ATO—Anti-Terrorist Operation—up to spring 2018). The students in Group III cited examples of volunteers who take care of children's homes or collect donations for soldiers in the ATO zone. In reference to Ukrainian civil society, many students in Group II agreed that citizens' participation in the political process—referred to by the students as "patriotism"—is the key to successful political development and the economic prosperity of the country. When one of the students in Group II confessed that, due to the perceived low living standards in Ukraine, she did not consider herself to be much of a patriot and would, in fact, like to emigrate, she received a strong rebuke from her fellow students, who were disappointed with her unwillingness to work for the country.

When describing the state-civil society relations in Ukraine, a student in Group II noted a difference between Ukrainian civil society and that of

Russia, explaining that Ukrainians have a strong understanding of their active role in the political life of the country and often challenge state policies, whereas Russians are more passive and mostly adhere to state rulings. The following dialogue ensued between this student and the moderator:

> Participant II-B: [A typical Ukrainian] differs from a typical Russian, probably because a Ukrainian has a sense of belonging to Ukrainian society and actively participates in public life.
>
> Moderator: And Russians do not?
>
> Participant II-B: No, they do, but they do so without a strong will ("*bezkhrebetno*" in the language of the participant).
>
> Moderator: What do you mean?
>
> Participant II-B: I think that everything is decided from above there. There's a pecking order, like in a hen house. The hen at the top gives the orders, and the other hens are subordinate to it. I think Russians are weak like that. They don't have an opinion of their own. They're afraid [to speak out]; they're oppressed; they're told what to do and they follow the rules. We can see this throughout Russian history. It's convenient for the political leadership.
>
> Moderator: Which political leadership?
>
> Participant II-B: The Russian leadership. It was convenient for Stalin, now for Putin.

Not all of the students agreed that civil society in Ukraine functions for the sake of ordinary people. Some students in Group III were concerned that some Euromaidan participants and some collectors of donations for the Ukrainian army also worked for their own personal gain, giving only a small part of the money they had collected to the organizations for which they were working. The same skepticism arose in Group III regarding the Euromaidan protestors. Whereas some students strongly believed that the protestors had fought against former President Ianukovych's regime, others argued that some did this for money. The students observed the same financially motivated pattern with people who "sell their votes" during elections. The students were referring to a practice whereby voters accept monetary or material benefits from candidates running for political office.

In regard to the socio-political order in Ukraine, the students noted that the political orientations of Ukrainians vary across regions. Group I specifically pointed to the regional dimension of the rule of former President Ianukovych, who hailed from the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk. The participants criticized Ukrainians in the east of the country who considered Crimea and eastern Ukraine to be Russian and argued that such people cannot be defined as Ukrainians. The students in Groups II and I also claimed

that different political orientations polarize Ukrainian citizens, particularly when it comes to people's attitudes toward Ukraine's relations with Russia and the European Union (EU). The students claimed that whereas some Ukrainians see their country as a part of Europe/the EU, others strive for a close union with Russia. In this context, the students in Group III revealed some family stories in which family members would not talk to each other due to their support for different Ukrainian political parties, as was the case in many Ukrainian families during the 2004-05 Orange Revolution when some supported Viktor Iushchenko and others Viktor Ianukovych for president. Other examples of citizen polarization in Ukraine, given by the students in the focus groups, included the break-up of families following the Euromaidan Revolution and Russia's annexation of Crimea. In some families, conflicts arose between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian family members.

National Culture

The students in the focus groups noted that specific cultural traditions are an inherent part of the Ukrainian national community. They gave the following examples: wearing an embroidered shirt known as "*vyshyvanka*"; celebrating weddings or Midsummer's Eve; observing religious holidays like Christmas and Easter; taking part in politically-oriented public holidays such as Independence Day, the Day of the Constitution, the Day of Flag. Other traditions mentioned by the students were eating lard, known as "*salo*," and drinking vodka ("*horilka*"). The students in Group III mentioned the currently popular "*vyshyvanka*" marches, when people dress in traditional Ukrainian embroidered shirts and march through the cities. According to the interviewees, all of these traditions—which they characterized as "patriotic"—had become even more appreciated among Ukrainians in recent years, following the Euromaidan Revolution and Russia's acts of aggression. The students in Group I recalled the latest celebration of Independence Day in Ukraine which reflected the high level of patriotism in Ukraine: people wore "*vyshyvanka*" to show their support for Ukrainian soldiers fighting in the east of the country. As a student in Group I put it, "It does not matter where you were born and who you are in Ukraine. The most important thing is a feeling of patriotism. This means that you understand [Ukrainian] culture and you want to know more about its origins." At the same time, the young people recognized that Ukrainian cultural traditions vary across the regions of Ukraine, and the students in Group I mentioned that Butter Week (Rus. "*Maslenitsa*"), for example, is often celebrated in the east of the country, whereas Christmas with traditional Ukrainian Christmas songs is the most popular celebration in western Ukrainian regions.

The observance of Christian holidays seems to be another Ukrainian cultural tradition that distinguishes the Ukrainian national community. The students in Groups I and III agreed that many different religions and beliefs are present in contemporary Ukraine, and that people are free to choose among them (the students' examples included Christianity [Orthodox and Catholic], Islam, Baptist, and Buddhism), or to remain atheists. Orthodox religion did not seem to play an important role in their definition of the Ukrainian nation; only one of the twelve participants cited Orthodoxy as an important criterion of national belonging in Ukraine (Table 2). Yet the students believed that the most widespread religious traditions that unite Ukrainians are the celebrations of Easter and Christmas with the family in church. Group III students came to the conclusion that the majority of Ukrainians are Christian and that Christianity effectively defines the Ukrainian national community. However, in this group, some of the students strongly objected to the baptism of small children, which is often enforced by the older generation. They argued that people should be able to freely choose their religion in adulthood.

Passionate debates arose in Groups III and I in regard to whether Ukrainian cultural traditions can be acquired during one's lifetime, or whether they are inherited from Ukrainian parents. In Group I, a student argued that a person who acquires Ukrainian citizenship is not a true Ukrainian. He stated that to be considered Ukrainian, a person should be born in Ukraine and should have lived most of his/her life in the country. The other students in Group I objected to this view, bringing up examples of Ukrainians who had immigrated to the USA. Children of such immigrants, who were born abroad and who had absorbed Ukrainian traditions from their parents, could also be considered Ukrainian. Some students in Group III argued that "there are some things that are inherited through blood," and one cannot become Ukrainian, even if Ukrainian citizenship is acquired. These students agreed that Ukrainian nationality is derived from having Ukrainian parents. Other students in Group III strongly opposed this view, arguing that one does not have to have Ukrainian parents to be Ukrainian; it is sufficient to have patriotic feelings toward Ukraine. The students in this group claimed that there are some foreigners who have settled in Ukraine and who can be considered Ukrainian due to their observance of Ukrainian cultural traditions. They agreed that the same distinction holds for Ukrainians who were born in the USA and who maintain Ukrainian traditions. The following is an excerpt from the Group III discussion:

> Moderator: What can one do to become Ukrainian?
>
> All together: Become?
>
> Moderator: For example, a person who was not born Ukrainian—a foreigner who obtained Ukrainian citizenship.
>
> Participant III-B: But he or she will never become Ukrainian!
>
> Moderator: Never?
>
> Participant III-A: This is not possible.
>
> Participant III-D: Yes, it is possible, if one integrates with Ukrainians and adopts the Ukrainian lifestyle.
>
> Participant III-A: But those people have a different mentality. A person will always be connected to his or her motherland. You have to have this connection from the very beginning, and this means he or she cannot become a completely different person.

One of the best examples of this train of thought was a discussion in Group III concerning a common friend who was of North Caucasian origin, but who had been living in Ukraine with his parents since he was a baby. Whereas some students argued that he could not be considered Ukrainian (or at least not fully Ukrainian) since he also follows some cultural traditions transmitted to him by his parents, others claimed that he is a true Ukrainian as he has lived in Ukraine all his life and has absorbed the Ukrainian culture. The data in Table 2 indicate that ten of the twelve participants in the focus group cited "feeling Ukrainian" to be an indicator of national belonging in Ukraine.

For some students, the cultural aspect of Ukrainian identity was embodied in their understanding of male-female relations. These relations were imagined in a traditional way, where males play the role of warriors and resistance fighters and females of home-carers. Some of the students in Group III primarily associated Ukrainians historically with Cossacks, the male warriors of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries who fought for Ukrainian self-determination. Other historical figures that the students referred to as Ukrainians were also males; they included the bards that played traditional Ukrainian songs on a musical instrument called the "*kobza*," the nineteenth-century Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, and the philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda. One participant in Group I conceptualized Ukraine metaphorically as a woman, who she imagined dressed in a traditional Ukrainian outfit, waiting for her husband to return home for dinner after working in the field. The woman was described as a hard-working wife and mother.

All participants in Groups I and III agreed that Ukrainian should be the official language in Ukraine, although people should be free to speak other languages, including Russian. According to the data in Table 2, seven out of twelve participants regarded speaking Ukrainian to be an important

criterion for being Ukrainian. In this respect, the students in Group III observed that Ukraine is a regionally diverse community, with people speaking many dialects, including "*surzhyk*," in the central Ukrainian city of Poltava; Russian in the northern, eastern and south-eastern Ukrainian cities of Kharkiv, Odesa, Kherson, and Chernihiv; and Ukrainian in the western Ukrainian cities of Lviv, Ternopil, and Lutsk. The students maintained that regardless of the language that people speak in these different places, they all have a bona fide right to be considered Ukrainian. However, the students in Group I agreed that those who speak Ukrainian, observe Ukrainian traditions, and respect Ukrainian culture, are more intensely Ukrainian—as exemplified in the following argument in Group I:

> Participant I-A: Each person who lives in Ukraine has his/her own characteristics: one can speak Ukrainian, another "*surzhyk*," and yet another Russian. But when it comes to traditions, those who speak Ukrainian are more inclined to observe Ukrainian traditions. These are the people in western Ukraine. I agree that they are spiritually ("*dushevno*" in the language of the participant) closer to Ukraine than people who live in the north, south, or the east of the country. But this depends on the person.
>
> Moderator: And in what way are they closer to Ukraine?
>
> Participant I-A: In a spiritual way. They observe Ukrainian culture and traditions more and wear embroidered shirts; they endorse these traditions more than in other regions. Or if we take the events in the Maidan, for example. When I was there in February and March, the majority of people were from Lviv, Uzhhorod, and Ivano-Frankivsk. If we take one person from western Ukraine and another from eastern Ukraine, this would be two different people in terms of communication and in their understanding of what Ukraine is, who can be considered Ukrainian, and what Ukrainian traditions and culture are.

National Mindset

According to the focus group participants, another feature of belonging to the Ukrainian nation is the possession of specific character traits and a certain mindset, or "mentality" as they called it. The students agreed that the way in which Ukrainians resist Russian aggression today shows that they are freedom-loving people. One student in Group II argued that "Ukrainians are very stubborn, they're bull-headed and resist until the very end." The students claimed that this trait was most vividly demonstrated during the Euromaidan Revolution in 2013-14. Participants in Groups I and III agreed that these character traits can be traced back in Ukrainian history to the time when Ukrainians fought against Russian or Polish oppression. Group III participants connected Ukrainian resistance to foreign aggression and to

Ukrainian historical figures like the poet Shevchenko, the Cossacks, or the dissidents of the late Soviet period. Other Ukrainian characteristics mentioned by the students were slyness ("*khytryi/a*" in the language of the participants) and humbleness ("*prostyi/a*" in the language of the participants).

In this respect, a fierce debate emerged in Group II regarding the extent to which Ukrainians living in the east and west of the country have similar or different character traits. Whereas some students in this group characterized Ukrainians in western regions (e.g., Lviv and Ternopil) as being the more friendly and helpful than Ukrainians in other regions, others argued that Ukrainians from central Ukrainian regions (e.g., Poltava) were also friendly and helpful. A participant in Group II gave an example concerning her family relations. When attending the confirmation of her cousin in western Ukraine, she observed that people in the church showed kindness and their devotion to God, but on leaving the church, they looked at each other with a kind of hatred. Another Group II participant disagreed with the "two-faced" description of Ukrainians in western Ukraine. She recounted that she had worked for some time in a café in the Ukrainian state-controlled part of the Luhansk oblast. The military personnel from the Ternopil and Zhytomyr oblasts that used to have lunch there had come across as very empathetic ("*dushevnyi/a*"). A third Group II participant recalled that while attending a family wedding in the Lviv oblast, she had made some good friends and therefore held the opinion that people in western Ukraine are more open-minded and friendly than those in the rest of the country.

Other personal characteristics that students considered to be common among Ukrainians were patriotism, love and respect for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, and a knowledge of Ukrainian history and the Ukrainian language. The other character trait that the students wanted to foster in Ukrainian society was compassion ("*liudianist'*," in the language of the participants), which was linked, for example, to taking care of the elderly and the environment. In Group I, the uprising against the corrupt political regime during the Euromaidan Revolution in Kyiv and the fight that Ukrainian soldiers are putting up in eastern Ukraine were also cited as examples of patriotism. When asked by the moderator whether she considered herself Ukrainian, a Group I participant replied: "First, I'm a Ukrainian citizen, and second, I'm a patriot of my country. I live according to Ukrainian moral values; I have positive attitudes towards people; I don't have negative attitudes towards my country and the Ukrainian population; and I love Ukraine and the Ukrainian people."

The students in Groups I and II were uncertain as to what extent those who emigrated from Ukraine could still be considered Ukrainian. In instances where Ukrainian emigrants contributed to Ukraine's development,

they were still seen as Ukrainian patriots, but those Ukrainians who forgot their Ukrainian origins, who regarded Ukrainians as not having their own history and culture, and who did not love their country were not seen as Ukrainian. The following excerpt from the Group II discussion highlights this:

> Moderator: Can we regard those people who leave Ukraine as Ukrainian?
>
> Participant II-A: I don't think so.
>
> Participant II-C: I think we can, if you live in another country, for example, but you love Ukraine. I don't think we should consider them outsiders just because their lives turned out that way.
>
> Participant II-A: I think there are different situations. If you left a region for the sake of your family's security, for example, if you're a refugee, then it's understandable. But if you want to leave Ukraine just to live in another country, then you're not a patriot of your country.
>
> Participant II-C: Okay, not a patriot, but such a person will remain Ukrainian.
>
> Participant II-A: Yes, Ukrainian, but in inverted commas. I'm not sure about it.
>
> Participant II-B: Those who have gone abroad can't be regarded as traitors ("*zradnyk*," in the language of the participant). [...]. As you can't choose your [home] country, just like you can't choose your parents, you can leave the country, but you have to help your parents, you have to take care of your country and the family that you left behind. When abroad, you have to talk about your country in positive terms; you have to love it; and you can regard only your [home] country as your motherland. And in this way, you're a patriot not a traitor, even if you live somewhere else. This isn't treason. But if a person runs away from their problems, tells others that their country is lousy and undeveloped, if one doesn't care about their country, then they're a traitor.

The students felt that Ukrainians are entitled to a sovereign nation-state, independent of Russia. As indicated in Table 2, eight out of twelve participants cited respect for Ukraine's independence and eleven out of twelve participants cited respect for the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian laws as important in being considered to be a Ukrainian. As a student in Group II put it, "One of the challenges in Ukraine today is not to retreat, not to be slow, not to allow ourselves to be taken over. We have to forge an understanding that in five or ten years everybody will think of themselves as Ukrainian and won't want unification with Russia or anything to do with Russia." The students in Groups II and III agreed that recent events connected to Russia's aggression had led to a Ukrainian national revival and to an understanding of Ukraine's independence from Russia. The existence of a common enemy had the effect of consolidating the Ukrainian nation and preserving its

statehood. At the same time, some students questioned the genuineness of such patriotic feelings. In Group II, the students observed that patriotism had reached a high level in Ukraine ever since the outbreak of the war in Donbas in 2014, when a real threat to Ukraine's sovereignty arose, and the students wondered why patriotism was not present in Ukrainian society before this point. The students in Group III argued that the consolidation of the Ukrainian nation could not be measured in patriotic activities, such as waving the national flag, shouting "Glory to Ukraine!," or painting your nails in the colours of the Ukrainian national flag. The Group III participants thought there should be a real contribution (e.g., political participation) to bringing about positive change in the country.

Table 2. What is important when it comes to being a true Ukrainian? (Total number of answers)

Categories	Group I	Group II	Group III
feeling Ukrainian	4	2	4
living most of your life in Ukraine	1	0	0
speaking the Ukrainian language	2	3	2
possessing Ukrainian citizenship	2	0	1
having parents with Ukrainian ethnicity	0	1	2
respecting the Ukrainian state and laws	4	3	4
respecting Ukraine's independence	4	1	3
being Orthodox	1	0	0
being born in Ukraine	2	0	2
other	1: to be a patriot	1: to participate in the country's political life	0

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This article identifies how, in the context of political and societal changes in the aftermath of the 2013-14 Euromaidan Revolution, young Ukrainians perceive their national community, and whom they consider to be Ukrainian. The focus group discussions revealed that young people in Ukraine imagine their nation in terms of three specific features: the socio-political order, the culture, and the mentality of the inhabitants. The first theme is associated with the social fragmentation of Ukrainian society, where a line has been drawn between the political leadership of the country and the ordinary population. The Ukrainian national community was also conceptualized by the young people in terms of specific cultural traditions, which included not only traditional holidays, food, or clothes, but also religion, gender, and language. By defining the Ukrainian nation from the standpoint of specific moral values, the students referred to national character traits of Ukrainians and their loyalty to Ukraine as a sovereign state, independent from Russia.

Through this analysis, the current study expands the literature on popular perceptions of national identity in other countries. For example, in their research on the discursive construction of the Austrian nation, Ruth Wodak and others determined that in focus group discussions (as part of a larger study), the most salient categories of Austrian national identity were political and economic achievements, cultural characteristics (such as language, mentality, and behaviour), a common political past, and Austria's neutrality, namely its non-alignment with NATO or other military-political blocs (106-45). In Nola Purdie and Lynn Wilss' study on what it means to be Australian, school students associated the Australian nation, in their essays, with national and personal well-being, democracy, personal character traits, the environment, sports, citizenship, and a diversity of cultures and lifestyles (72).

Concepts that characterized the Ukrainian students' understanding of the Ukrainian nation—such as the inter-generational divide, regionalism, and patriotism—transcend the above-mentioned themes. This study unveiled the presence of an inter-generational divide in contemporary Ukraine. Evidence from the focus groups reveals that young people in Ukraine often define themselves as being in opposition to the older generation. For them, the older generation that was socialized in the Soviet Union is associated with poverty, religiosity, and pro-Russian attitudes. As citizens of an independent Ukraine, young Ukrainians see themselves as having more freedom of choice in life. At the same time, the students showed respect for the elderly and assigned the family—grandparents and parents—an important role in the transmission of Ukrainian national identity, particularly when Ukrainians emigrate to other countries. The role of young people in post-Euromaidan Ukraine has likewise remained

ambivalent. Whereas some have taken on the role of drivers of political change, others have remained distrustful toward the political elite of the country. This is in line with the findings of previous studies of young people's political preferences in Ukraine. Research that explored the roles played by young people in the Orange Revolution of 2004-05 and the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-14 found that young Ukrainians are presently active in civil society (for example, by establishing various non-governmental organizations and volunteering to help refugees from the Donbas region), but have little opportunity to enter formal politics. Accordingly, they remain disoriented and distrustful toward the country's political elite (Röthig; Diuk; Mangas).

This study further discovered that regional diversity plays a pivotal role in the definition of the Ukrainian nation. Regionalism has long been a point of debate in studies on Ukrainian national identity. Today's Ukraine encompasses territories that were historically part of other state formations. From the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, Ukrainians were ruled by Habsburg and Russian empires. In the aftermath of World War I, the Ukrainian territories were divided between Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. Only at the outbreak of World War II did Transcarpathia become part of Soviet Ukraine, as did the regions of Bukovyna and Galicia, with Crimea finally becoming part of Ukraine in 1954 (Popson). Given these historical experiences, there is a strong understanding of the regional differences that exist among the Ukrainian population. This profound role of regionalism in Ukrainian identity politics has led to a scholarly debate whereby some scholars adhere to the argument that there are "two Ukraines" following the east/west divide, while others object to this thesis and argue that Ukrainian regionalism is a much more complex phenomenon (Zhurzhenko; Szporluk; Hrytsak; Riabchuk; Rodgers).

The ambivalent aspect of Ukrainian national identity was evident in the focus groups. Participants had respect for the regional diversity in Ukraine, associating certain regions with the diversity of languages, cultural traditions, or political cultures. However, western Ukrainian regions were considered to be more Ukrainian than eastern and south-eastern regions. This was exemplified through the people's use of the Ukrainian language, the celebration of what were considered to be traditional Ukrainian holidays (like Christmas and Easter), the possession of national character traits such as friendliness and empathy, and the will to improve the political regime in the country. Eastern Ukrainians were frequently seen by participants as supporters of Ukraine's unity with Russia, which was strongly at odds with the political positioning of the students in the focus groups.

The young people in the focus groups further defined the Ukrainian nation on the basis of patriotism, dividing the Ukrainian population into patriotic and unpatriotic citizens. The definition of membership in the

Ukrainian community on the basis of patriotism speaks to the scholarly literature on ethnic and civic nation-building, where the former often has a negative connotation, and the latter a more positive association with patriotism rather than with nationalism (Kuzio, "Nationalism in Ukraine"). Several previous studies of Ukraine have discussed the applicability of these concepts to Ukraine. Whereas some scholars argue that the post-Soviet Ukrainian leadership has pursued an ethno-cultural nation-building project where a large role is attributed to Ukrainian ethnicity, others claim that the formation of a civic community has also taken place in Ukraine (Kuzio, "Nationalism in Ukraine"; Brubaker; Kuzio, "'Nationalising States'"; Shulman). In the focus groups described here, the young participants defined the Ukrainian nation in terms of both ethnic and civic dimensions. On the one hand, the young people advocated that one can be Ukrainian only if he or she is born in Ukraine or inherits Ukrainian cultural traditions from his or her Ukrainian parents, thus emphasizing a common ethno-cultural descent. On the other hand, the students argued that such traditions can be acquired during one's lifetime, and that Ukrainian citizenship should be given to those who observe Ukrainian traditions and who are, in their opinion, patriots of Ukraine. The students' notions of patriotism embrace a demonstration of pride, love, and loyalty toward Ukraine, an observance of Ukrainian cultural traditions, a willingness to work for the country's development, and respect for Ukrainian statehood.

This view, which indicates the importance of civic values in the definition of the Ukrainian national community, is also expressed in the students' attitudes towards the Ukrainian diaspora. The students claimed that Ukrainians living abroad can be identified as Ukrainian in relation to their common cultural descent and to their belief in the Ukrainian nation as a political community. According to the focus group participants, Ukrainian emigrants who do not take pride in Ukraine cease to be Ukrainian. Participants indicated that feeling Ukrainian and respecting the Ukrainian state, laws, and independence are more important for national identification than having parents with Ukrainian ethnicity, being born in Ukraine, speaking the Ukrainian language, and possessing Ukrainian citizenship.

To conclude, more investigation is needed with regard to regional, ethnic, linguistic, and gender backgrounds of research participants as sources of conceptions of Ukrainian nationhood. Another conceptual issue to be explored is identity hierarchy, i.e., the prevalence of local, regional, or European identity among the youth. Finally, it would be interesting to study how the young people's discourse on national identity intersects with other discourses, be it school education, media, or politics. The present article opens an avenue for further exploration of young people's conceptions of national identity in Ukraine.

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