

Everyday Ethnicity in Chernivtsi, Western Ukraine.¹

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Abstract: Chernivtsi, a contemporary town located in Western Ukraine, is perceived as one of the most multiethnic places in Ukraine. Situated in the Ukrainian-Romanian borderlands, Chernivtsi's ruling state and dominant national group has changed four times in its history. Since 1991, this city has been an arena for both a "Ukrainization" policy as well as the revival of national minority institutions. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Chernivtsi since 2010 and explores why and when ethnicity as a category of practice matters for ordinary people. By using the methodology of the "everyday" and taking "situational" ethnicity as a major approach, for individuals in Chernivtsi, I show "Ukrainianess" becomes an unmarked, obvious and taken for granted category in daily life. Thus, the nationalizing efforts of the Ukrainian state, which since the late socialist period constantly marked "Ukrainianess" as a significant category, can be perceived as successful and other national manifestations do not pose any threat to it.

Keywords: ethnicity, identity, urban space, fieldwork, Ukraine

Introduction

In the context of Ukraine, ethnicity is primarily discussed in reference to the linguistic debates between Ukrainians and Russians. According to this approach, the Ukrainian state and nation formation is often seen through the lens of Ukrainian-Russian relations and the case studies of Lviv and Donetsk as highly Ukrainian and Russian cities respectively (Kuzio 1998; see also Wilson 1997).² However, the case of Chernivtsi, a town located in Western Ukraine, shows that there are still highly ethnically diverse places in which the main relations are formed between different minorities (Krughlasov 2013). By showing the complexity of everyday ethnicity in this particular town, I offer a kind of counterpoint to the mainstream academic literature on contemporary Ukrainian identity formation.

According to the most recent census of 2001, around 65 different nationalities live in Chernivtsi.³ Four of these are the most important for the city's history and current local politics: "Ukrainians", "Jews", "Romanians" and "Poles".⁴ All of these groups have a long tradition of activity in cultural associations (known as National Houses), which publish materials in their own language and organize a number of national celebrations.⁵ The other nationalities who inhabit Chernivtsi are connected with two main migration movements (Krughlasov 2013). The first was post-Second World War migrations connected with a Soviet population movement in which mostly the so-called "Russified" Jews, soldiers from other parts of the Soviet Union and people of other nationalities came to Chernivtsi. The second was a post-1991 economic migration connected with the establishment of huge open-air market in the city.⁶

Furthermore, since the beginning of 1991, Chernivtsi has shown a slow process in the revival of multiethnic life. Children have the possibility to be educated in national languages and a Jewish school was opened. A number of new national associations appeared. A new

synagogue opened. The city center became revitalized⁷ and a number of books on the city's cosmopolitan history were published. These are but a few characteristics of the city since the fall of socialism.

Many scholars argue nationalism should be studied both from “above” and “below” (Hobsbawm 1992) or from its “formal” and “informal” side (Eriksen 1993). However, based on my ethnographic research conducted in the city since 2010, I focus primarily on local nationalist politics and everyday patterns of identification and categorization.⁸ Thus, the primary aim of this article is to focus on the bottom-up perspective of everyday patterns of self-ascription and categorization (Tajfel 1981: 254-267) in which ethnicity is “situational” (Okamura 1981: 452-465). My main questions are: why and when does ethnicity as a category of practice matter in the everyday life of the ordinary citizens of Chernivtsi? And, to what extent does it shape people's everyday choices, and in which situations does it become important? Based on the everyday ethnicity approach, I argue that although there is an observed minority institution revival, after more than 20 years of Ukraine's independence “Ukrainianess” has become for ordinary people an unmarked, taken for granted and almost obvious category of their everyday life, visible, reused and reconstructed in a number of social situations. As such, other minority expressions are closed in the narrow circle of national institutions and serve particular instrumental goals of individuals. This is the result of more than 20 years of constant nationalization in almost every domain of life by the Ukrainian state; however, in Chernivtsi one continues to find different national myths connected with the diverse history of the region, even if they are at the margin of a mainstream state's nationalizing efforts.⁹

Investigating the everyday

Without a doubt, the concept of everyday life is frequently and often automatically used by scholars. As Norbert Elias (1998) points out, “the concept of the everyday has become anything but everyday”, stressing that it is actually unclear what “everyday” means. Michel de Certeau (2011), one of the most well-known researchers of the everyday, distinguishes two aspects in which the everyday ways of acting are expressed by people. The first concerns *behaviors* which are visible in the social organization of urban space and its “consuming” by ordinary people. It contains the variety of ways in which people “are doing things” that are selected by the researcher according to the value for the strategy of analysis. The second element is bound to *expected symbolic benefits* - those interactions (very often unselfconscious) which are relative to structures of expectations, negotiations and improvisations. As an anthropologist, I focus on the first approach proposed by de Certeau, mainly *routine behaviors*, which are visible, observable, and noted as significant acts by an ethnographer through his or her contact with people in the field.

However, my understanding of the ‘everyday’ addressed both in my fieldwork and in this article is much broader than mentioned above. For a scholar who tries to explain the idea of everyday, one of the most important elements is to define what is not everyday life. Are holidays, or occupational and institutional life part of the everyday? Or perhaps this concept refers only to those aspects which are connected with private and family life? In my case, I define both as a part of the everyday. Thus, my broad definition concerns those aspects of

human life which are related to the sphere of natural, routine, spontaneous, and very often unreflective experiences, acts, and thinking. In contrast “not-everyday” are those aspects of life which are reflective, artificial, unspontaneous and very often institutionalized. However, I need to point out that on the ground both levels often intermingle and it is impossible to separate them.

Researchers can also find similar problems with the so-called “everyday ethnicity” approach. In response, social anthropology can offer a unique position to investigate ethnicity while focusing on the ways “in which ethnic relationships are being defined and perceived by people” (Eiksen 1993, 1) in everyday contexts. It is observed and perceived by individuals in national holidays, festivals, the daily press, political discourse, and popular culture, just to mention a few examples. However, ethnicity first appears and is constituted through the social contact of individuals who, as a result of this contact, define themselves as members of a particular group opposite to the “Others”. In this sense social categorization always brings the division between “us” and “them” (Tajfel 1981). Thus, according to this social identity theory, individuals become a part of “groups” by various ways of identifying themselves and others. Everyday ethnicity can be both inclusive when it refers to those who are believed as forming one group and exclusive when they think about those who are not.¹⁰

In the following article, I propose the framework provided by Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008), who describe four ways in which nationhood is negotiated and reproduced in everyday life.¹¹ However, I propose some minor modifications to this theory. First, “talking the nation,” represents the idea of how the nation is a discursive construct. As is suggested by Rogers Brubaker (2006), ethnicity is rarely something ordinary people talk about. It mainly appears in the form of prejudice and stereotypes, which can have their origin in local socio-cultural specificities of inter-ethnic relations, particular experiences of reality or dominant ideologies. Although according to Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) “talking the nation” should focus mostly on elites’ discourses, in the following article I follow Brubaker’s approach (2006) which highlights the presence of marked and unmarked ethnic categories in everyday talk.¹²

Second, “choosing the nation,” refers to the way peoples’ choices are framed by nationhood. In this approach, one should focus on such aspects of everyday life, such as choices to read the national newspaper, to send a child to the national school, to be part of a particular nationally or religiously-framed institution, or to be willing to participate in national celebrations.

The third way in which nationhood is produced and reproduced in everyday life is called “performing the nation” – here the stress is put on the understanding and use of national symbols by people. This approach is partially based on Michael Billig’s (1995) sense of “banal nationalism.” For Billig, nationhood is “regularly flagged” by the media, national holidays, and elites’ activity through which “citizenry being unmindfully reminded of their national identity” (*Ibid*, 154). This is also close to Thomas Eriksen’s (1993) idea of informal nationalism, which refers to dimensions typical for civil society such as collective events, ritual celebrations, international sport competitions and so on.

“Performing” is very closely related with “consuming” – the last way in which ethnicity and nationhood is produced and reproduced in everyday life. In this approach, one can study a variety of everyday life features: from the choice of foods of particular individuals

to the shopping and tourism industry (Caldwell 2002). Moreover, by “consuming the nation,” Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008) understand the role of public space, the character of restaurants, bars, cafes, squares and parks and the way in which they are perceived or consumed by ordinary people. Nevertheless, in the following article, because of similarities between “performing” and “consuming the nation” approaches, and the difficulty in separating them in everyday on-the-ground research, I join them together under the label “becoming the nation,” which was introduced by Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny in the volume *Becoming National* (1996). In my view, this term highlights the processual and often dynamic character of “groupness” formation.¹³

The “official” ethnicity in Chernivtsi

Since 1991, Chernivtsi’s city council has repeatedly stressed that one of its crucial aims is to protect the situation and aid the development of national minorities, and to create an environment for the development of national institutions that are directly responsible for strengthening national identities.¹⁴ In the district, 25 national organizations operate which are responsible for national language education, the promotion of traditions, and the protection of religious spheres. One of the most important aspects of the lives of minorities is education. Thus, in 85 schools members of different nationalities have the possibility to learn their own language and traditions as additional courses. This is especially visible in the case of Romanians, who have the possibility to attend additional classes in Romanian in 82 schools in the district. In the city itself, five schools operate with Romanian as the main language. Moreover, in three schools in the district and one in Chernivtsi, pupils have the possibility to study Polish language and traditions as additional courses. In the city there is also a Jewish school in which 60% of pupils have Jewish ancestry.¹⁵ National language education can also be fulfilled in some of the high schools in the city as well as at Jurji Fedkovych National University in Chernivtsi.¹⁶

Next to education, the local municipality stresses its support for the cultural activity of institutions in the form of collective events and festivals connected mostly with folklore and literary traditions. Such examples are the commemoration of the death of Romanian writer Mihail Eminescu, the Romanian festival of Spring, *Mărțișor*, meetings in memorial places connected with the tragic events of the Jewish community during the Second World War, and victims of the Stalinist regime. Moreover, Chernivtsi took part in the international folklore festival “Bukovinian meetings,” which was also held in Romania, Poland, and Hungary.

Communication issues are fulfilled by 28 printed periodicals which are published in the district. Twenty of these periodicals belong to the Romanian community. However, most of them are bi- or even trilingual (for example Ukrainian-Romanian-Russian). Almost every national institution has its own magazine which are distributed principally by the National Houses themselves or through local newsstands. Moreover, on local television 36.1 hours per month are dedicated to national language programs.¹⁷

Officially, among 99 different non-governmental organizations in Chernivtsi, 21 institutions are dedicated to the national life of its citizens. Among them are six which refer to the Romanian community, four to Jewish, one to Polish, two to Ukrainian as well as one to Russian and others are directed to Belarusian, Azerbaijan, Armenian and German

communities. For Ukrainians, Jews, Romanians and Poles, four nationalities which are historically bound with the city, the most important institutions are the National Houses.¹⁸ Although they are perceived as the most prestigious national organizations, in most cases, they are not very active and other institutions have to some extent replaced them. For example, for some Poles the local Catholic Church is the most important place of meetings, Jews are divided into several smaller circles along religious and social lines, for Romanians there are six institutions and several churches, and local Ukrainians are also divided into several churches but also do not claim a belonging to any national institution. As Sasha, one of my Chernivtsi friends, and a prominent writer, concludes, “although you have all these institutions, they do not produce anything significant – it looks like they are and in the same time they are not.” I will return to these organizations in a later part of this article where I discuss individuals’ motivations in joining these activities.

Although Chernivtsi is perceived as a divided city according to the people I talked to, one can conclude that there are actually no ethnically marked places. One cannot say “I am going to a Jewish restaurant” or to “visit the Romanian barber,” mostly because these kind of places do not exist. This lack of ethnically marked places can be determined by the widespread status of Ukrainian and Russian languages in all kinds of public spheres. The same is the case in the territorial dimension of the city. In the past, especially during the Austro-Hungarian period, ethnicity was partially territorialized in the city. The upper part of the city (today’s city center) was inhabited by members of the high-status Jewish and German communities, while the lower part was mostly occupied by poor and religious Jews. Moreover, the city’s suburbs were ethicized – Kalichanka was a rural German suburb, while Rosha was Romanian (Skorejiko 2008).

All nationalities now live together, do their shopping in the same places, go to the same restaurants (which represents *Bukovinian cuisine* rather than any national one), pubs, doctors and lawyers, use the same public transport, and in all cases, Ukrainian and Russian are the most frequent languages. Once, Oksana described to me the problem of one of her former students who was Romanian by origin. This girl faced a huge problem in learning the Ukrainian language at university. Through a tremendous effort, she learned Ukrainian and managed to obtain her degree in psychology (mostly because of part-time studies in Romania as well). When she came back to the city, Oksana suggested that she open an office for local Romanians since there is no psychologist in Chernivtsi who speaks in Romanian, and Romanians are the third largest nationality in the city after Ukrainians and Russians. Although the girl followed her advice, she faced another difficulty. She did not know how to get access to the individuals who speak Romanian, as she stressed that “there are no Romanian places in the city where she could even leave her card.”

Since independence, in the official rhetoric of the municipality, the category of “Ukrainianess” is constantly marked. Although recently local politics have turned to the cosmopolitan myth of Czernowitz, this still it serves particular “Ukrainian” interests.¹⁹ As it is stressed by the municipality, each of the nationalities has a right to organize itself in forms of associations which then should bear the educational and cultural aspects of the everyday life of its community. In this sense, ethnicity is being closed in institutional circles and as such does not enter the public sphere. Nonetheless, in the official rhetoric of the municipality one can find a kind of pride that Chernivtsi both used to be such a diverse city and still to some

extent remains so. It is visible especially in the cityscape in which one can find asymmetries between different national representations.²⁰

Everyday talks

In the everyday life in Chernivtsi, marked and unmarked categories can be investigated through the ways in which individuals stress these categories in their conversations, perceptions, and social experience. Here, as I claim in a later part of this article, ethnic categories are rarely present in the everyday life of individuals. However, when they appear, it is mostly in the form of ethnic stereotypes and prejudice. They play an important role in establishing the boundary, justifying the perceived position and ascribing a meaning to the group to which one thinks he or she belongs, or in opposition to others' group belonging (Cornell and Hartmann 1998: 81).

In shops, restaurants, buses, and in any kind of usual informal conversation one can rarely hear individuals talking with each other about ethnicity. It looks like it is not the kind of topic which is relevant and significant on a daily basis. Labor markets, economic issues, buying necessary goods, complaints, and gossip seem to dominate everyday talk.²¹ The most important aspect is that everywhere and with everyone, one can speak Ukrainian, Russian or in *Surzyk*.²² Ethnicity, if it appears, seems to be a very sensitive topic for discussion, mostly because from the Ukrainian point of view, "Romanians" and especially "Moldovans" are associated with lower status.²³

In the everyday talk in Chernivtsi, two "groups" appear to be the most frequent victims of stereotyping talk are "Newcomers" connected mostly with recent rural-urban migration but also with the work on the open-air market (the so-called new nationalities in Chernivtsi such as Turks and Azerbaijanis), and Moldovans who, because of the lack of knowledge of Ukrainian and their perceived "worse" behavior.

"You know, the specificity of Chernivtsi is that you never make jokes about nationalities if you do not know the company. You never know if there are some Jewish, Moldavians, Romanians or Poles among your surroundings" Julia, a young teacher, answered when I asked her about what she thinks is most special about the town and its multiethnic component. The statement shows that individuals very often perceive the city as being diverse and divided. This sentence can also suggest that in some situations people are very cautious in choosing their friends. In the case of Julia, she almost always stresses that all her local friends are Ukrainians, by which she understands both that Ukrainian is their everyday language and that being Ukrainian is their most important identification. She told me once that the father of one of her friends was Romanian and that probably this friend (who I know personally) has a Romanian passport. But Julia stresses that she never talked about this with her. When I asked her why (and if maybe this colleague is willing to talk with me), she answered that "I don't want to ask her about these issues...you know, I can tell you... that here being Romanian is something people are ashamed of." Two elements seem to be the most important in this statement. First ethnicity is a matter of prestige. There are "better" and "worse" ethnicities, while Ukrainian, probably because of my interlocutor's Ukrainian identification, is perceived as the better one. Second, one's own ethnicity is a matter more of identification than origin. This friend of Julia, although having a Romanian father, was still not a Romanian in the eyes

of my colleague probably because of a lack of strong identification. It appears in many social situations that people distinguish the ethnic origin and ethnic identification. Ethnic origin is something you can use (to get a citizenship, travel abroad, migrate) but it does not have to be in common with one's own ethnic identification, which can be connected more with language and family traditions.

For Julia, the second "group" which is visible in Chernivtsi is "Moldovans." They cannot dress properly, do not have any style (and these elements make them visible and distinguishable in the cityscape). She also admits that she does not like to go to places which are popular among Moldovans. According to her, especially one local disco is a meeting point of Moldovans, who she described as "middle-aged, belly guys who wear leather jackets, play with their mobiles, drink too much and want to chat with young Ukrainian girls. This disco is not a good place to go."

Julia's knowledge about Moldovans and the "Moldovan disco" is rather a manner of stereotyping imagination that actual reality. In order to check Julia's opinion, I visited this place once and as for me it was the same kind of disco as any other in Chernivtsi, filled with students. Also, some other people concluded that *Tornado* (the name of the place) is the same kind of ethnically-free place as any other in Chernivtsi. However, it is interesting to see how Julia defines this place and Moldovans themselves. They are bad mannered, drink too much, wear not very fancy clothes and, because of their behavior, a Ukrainian girl cannot feel safe in this place. Julia, who is not from Chernivtsi and who came here to study directed her prejudice towards the "newcomers"--mostly Moldovans--since because they are more visible for her in the cityscape (the characteristic leather jackets) and she shares a particular space (so Julia lives in the suburbs, she likes to do shopping on the local market, visits local discos in free time) with them, she perceives them as threat and a source of insecurity. However, one needs to take into consideration that in many other situations Julia freely communicates with Moldovans, Turks and any other newcomers. For example, when she is doing her shopping on the local open-air market, she knows that some products she can buy only from them (and there are even better there). In Chernivtsi she also used to have a Moldovan boyfriend about whom she talked only in good terms (as a hardworking and independent person).

Another interesting example was Sviatlana. She used to be my Russian teacher at Yuriy Fedkovych National University in Chernivtsi.²⁴ During our classes she liked to stress her commitment to local Ukrainian traditions (*Bukovinian* – as she named it). As an academic teacher she came to Chernivtsi after she married Sviatoslav, whose family belonged to the local Ukrainian – or rather Bukovinian - elite, as she stressed. Many times she described to me how they celebrate local traditions at home, and how Bukovinian Ukrainians are distinct and form special groups compared to others in the country. While being proud of her belonging to the local elite, she many times stressed how Romanians and Moldavians are different. She repeated how both groups are lazy and do not want to learn Ukrainian ("you speak in Russian much better than my Moldavian and Romanian students in Ukrainian" – and I speak very badly in Russian!). The presence of other groups in Chernivtsi (such as Jews) she referred to only in the past tense, since for her Chernivtsi used to be a Jewish town, but this is no longer the case. Sviatlana is a classic example of how one creates the positive self-esteem of his/her own group in the contrast to an out-group. For Sviatlana, defining herself as a Bukovinian Ukrainian is a source of pride, a set of values and elements which make her a

local elite. Language, customs, and a kind of local specificity make her better not only in the contrast to other local nationalities, but also among other Ukrainians. Moldovans and Romanians who live in the city are perceived as a threat for local traditions, customs and language, and Svetlana – who sees herself as a member of the local Bukovinian - is afraid that they will take power and dominance in the city. Because of the borderland location of Chernivtsi, there is a lot of migration to the city of people from neighboring countries as well as nearby villages in Ukraine, so she thinks that this is possible.

However, Moldavians and (to some extent) Romanians are not the only objects of stereotypes and prejudices. Another significant group are the Jews. The main difference in perceiving “the Romanians” and “the Jews” is that in the case of the former, stereotypes are directed into the members of one’s own community (local Romanians and Moldovans) while in the case of Jews, they refer to some undefined category of people living abroad. Thus, local “Jews” do not exist in individuals’ stereotyping languages but rather some international group that one can benefit from.

One of the examples of how “the unknown Jews” are the subjects of stereotyping language was during my participation in the project of cleaning a local Jewish cemetery.²⁵ The other volunteers and I often used public transport or taxis and it was a great occasion to talk with locals, the majority of whom did not see any purpose in cleaning the Jewish cemetery. “If Jews want to have it cleaned, they should pay Ukrainians for doing it.” Together with this kind of statement we heard also lots of stories about when Jews who live abroad paid local people large sums of money (more or less the monthly salary) for cleaning the Jewish tombstones. Thus, for some, Jews are perceived as a very powerful and reach group.

During my discussions with people, they mostly referred to “Jews” while talking about the past of the town. However, this does not mean that ordinary people know local history: “you just know that Chernivtsi used to be a Jewish town.” They often can not tell any details about what this actually means. In certain kinds of talk, Jews are perceived as a powerful and influential group in the town. Katya was the only volunteer from Chernivtsi who joined the workcamp cleaning the local Jewish cemetery. She became one of the most engaged participants, warmly welcomed by the international participants, as “the only local young person who cares about the Jewish cemetery.” Once, when she told me her motivation to join the project, she described the situation of her friend, who was working in a local shop. This friend was badly paid and could not afford basic needs. “I was trying to convince her,” Katya, – stressed “that she should join the workcamp. The Jews here are very powerful, many of them are the local deputies. If they just see her here, and then she would ask about the job, they would help her.” Katya could not give me any details on who she actually bears in mind by referring to “powerful Jews in the townhall”, instead it was more an example of a stereotype which is common for many citizens in Chernivtsi, who like to stress “again these Jews” in order to express their distaste for Jewish political influence in the city.²⁶

I assume that in almost all cases, “Ukrainianess” is an unmarked category for people in Chernivtsi. It is a natural and taken-for-granted category mostly because of the visibility and importance of Ukrainian language in daily life. It does not mean that everyone in Chernivtsi speaks this language. In many situations, it appears that Russian or *Surzyk* is the most frequent language of conversation. It is quite common that individuals talk with each other by mixing Russian and Ukrainian (one person can speak in Ukrainian and the other in

Russian) and it looks like until the moment they can't understand each other, language does not pose a problem.²⁷ However, in certain social situations, Ukrainian is perceived as a higher status language than Russian and especially than *Surzyk*. The latter is perceived as a marker for a "foreign or outside status" of the individual, which associates him with the peasantry and the so-called "low culture." Oksana, one of my interlocutors, who can be perceived as member of the local Ukrainian elite, stressed that very often she reprimands others if they cannot use Ukrainian properly in public places (for example, in restaurants and shops) and calls for learning the language. Once she described to me the situation when she and her husband went to a little cafeteria for a lunch:

There was this cute waiter but he couldn't speak Ukrainian at all. Even his Russian was really bad. I didn't know whether he is from Chernivtsi or from some village but once he annoyed so much (as he didn't even understand my Ukrainian) that instead of giving him a tip, I wrote on the bill - Please, learn Ukrainian if you want to have customers! Since that moment, always when I enter the cafeteria, he welcomed me saying: 'Dobrij den' (Ukrainian expression to say Good morning) and smiling ironically but he doesn't know more.

In almost all the conversations when the problem of *Surzyk* appears, it is in the context of newcomers in the city connected especially with the rural-urban migration and who are perceived to pose a danger to local high-level Ukrainian language and cultural specificity.²⁸

Rarely, one can hear languages other than Ukrainian, Russian or *Surzyk*. Sometimes, in public buses or bus stops, one can hear Romanian but it is reserved for private conversations and is often switched to Russian when the interlocutor has changed. The usage of Romanian is also a complicated ethnic marker. Individuals using the language can be of Romanian origin from Romania or from Moldova. As one cannot find any visible differences between them, other categories seem to be used. Again, as in the case of newcomers, clothing (again black tracksuit and black shoes) is the most important marker for Moldovans who, for Ukrainians, are perceived as lower in status than Romanians.²⁹

Polish also is rarely heard in the public space. If one can hear it, it is more probable that the person using it is a tourist or an outsider than a local citizen. Although the local Catholic church is perceived as a 'Polish church' (mostly because of the Polish origin of local priests and the general association of Poles with Catholicism), Polish is not the language of the holy mass but Ukrainian. Moreover, in my communication with local people connected with Polish national institutions, in most of the cases I used Ukrainian (mostly because of preference of my interlocutors). Polish was reserved for conversations with the priest (who is from Poland), with professor Strutyński who is the head of the Adam Mickiewicz Association of Polish Culture in Chernivtsi's district (known as the Polish National House) and a lecturer at Yuriy Fedkovych National University in Chernivtsi, and my local friend Sasha who is the translator of Polish literature into Ukrainian. In most other cases, and based on my teaching of classes held in a Catholic church, I can assume that most of the people who identify themselves as having Polish origin or ethnicity do not know the language well enough for a casual conversation. However, there were a couple of examples when Polish was a well preserved language but used only in private spheres.

Making the ethnically framed choices

Nationhood and ethnicity are also issues of people's everyday choices. However, one should distinguish two aspects and meanings of ethnically framed choices. The first refers to elites. In their case, reading a particular newspaper and joining the activities of institutions often stresses and highlights their sense of ethnic identification. For the Ukrainian elites of Chernivtsi, the most important practice is stressing the importance of the Ukrainian language in the everyday domain. Very often, because of the widespread usage of especially *Surzyk*, they perceived their own language as threatened. This is also one of the most important agendas of the Ukrainian National House.

Igor, one of the most important activists in this institution, described to me the reason for reopening the institution in 1991. "Many people question why in Ukraine there is a necessity to have a Ukrainian Cultural Institution. We claim that it is important as we are still a minority in our own state. In the 1980s, Chernivtsi was a Russian speaking city, now I can be proud to say that Ukrainian became here the most frequent everyday language." Igor is also one of the most active people in the institution who stresses the ethnic diversity of both historical and contemporary Chernivtsi. However, as he said "they [nationalities other than Ukrainians] should know that no matter of their ethnic origin they are all Ukrainian and should know the language." For Oksana, visiting other national institutions is not a marker of any national identification. "We (she and her husband) used to visit the Turkish association to watch good movies, our daughter attended to Polish House to learn the language, and in the Romanian House we participated in poetry meetings."

The second level of ethnically-framed choices are made by non-elites. For them, the "ethnic component" is often not such an important issue. As I stressed in the previous section, there are a number of more important aspects which shape the everyday life connected mostly with economic issues.

When it comes to everyday practices in Chernivtsi, "Ukrainianess" is again a matter of "unmarking" choices. The most popular local newspapers, such as *Chernivtsi* and *Molodij Bukovynec* are written in Ukrainian. They present the most important aspects of the local and state life connected with economic, political and cultural issues. Little (if any) stress is put on ethnicity and the internal life of any national institution. This part is reserved for national newspapers. However, these newspapers are sold mostly in national houses and refer to tiny aspects of national community life. The same is with language. Using Ukrainian is an important marker of identification for elites, but for ordinary people it is simply a useful and unconscious element of everyday life. When I lived in one of the poorest parts of the city center (in a communal style apartment), my neighbors used *Surzyk* in their everyday talk. In my communication with them I used Ukrainian (as I do not know Russian) and as such it was not a significant marker of any kind of identification. The most important thing was understanding each other.

At the university, students who do not know Ukrainian and for whom Russian or Romanian are native languages are forced to learn the language and very often suffer from discrimination and prejudice for not knowing it. Not using Ukrainian can be perceived as a marker of lower status, lack of education and proper behavior. Thus, in many spheres of life,

choosing Ukrainian is just more convenient, neutral or even privileged way of communication.

However, in Chernivtsi, since the beginning of the 1990s, opportunities to make ethnically framed choices have grown. One of the most significant moments was the opening of the Jewish school at that time. It was founded by Jewish organizations in Kiev and sponsored by foreign donors. From the beginning, mostly because of its financial situation, it was perceived as one of the best schools in town. Children whose parents or at least mothers were Jewish had the priority for entry to the school. Lesya, a local entrepreneur, described to me her struggle to send her daughter there: “My father was a Jew, however my mother was Russian, I do not care that for them I am not a ‘proper Jew’, I know I *am* and thus my daughter is as well.” Only by accident was she able to find a place for her daughter in the school. Interestingly, the school became extremely popular in the city, mostly because of its financial situation and good level of education. Thus, through time, as the director informed me, it became popular among Ukrainians who wanted to send their children there.

Lesya became one of the most active participants gathered around Rabbi Glitsenstein in Chernivtsi.³⁰ She participated in every meeting organized by the Rabbi’s wife and always talked about them with full respect, being astonished by their work in the town. Lesya does not follow any of the Jewish traditions and does not care much about the Jewish heritage of the city. For her participating in the activity of the Chabad community is a source of positive self-esteem. It stresses her uniqueness among other Ukrainians.

In most of the cases the reason for peoples’ choices is external and has an economic basis. Many people who participated in my classes wanted to obtain the *Karta Polaka* (the Polish Card) with which it is much easier to get a Polish visa and consequently permission to work in Poland (and the European Union). To get the *Karta Polaka*, you need to pass an interview with an embassy official. Besides documenting Polish ancestry, you need to speak the language fluently, know the traditions and be an active member of local associations. The Catholic Church, which is called by locals the Polish Church, belongs to them. The same is the case with Romanians. Because of the very open citizenship law in Romania, many people decide to change their passports. In most cases, it is not because they feel a special connection with “Romanianess” but because simply a Romanian passport is better than the Ukrainian one – especially after Romania joined the European Union. Thus, in most cases, becoming a part of the national institution in this sense is not a marker of identification but rather to achieve certain goals.

The external factor is also visible in the situation of Jewish organizations in Chernivtsi. Almost all of them (besides the Jewish National House which almost does not work) offer some benefits for its members. Hesed Shushana’s work is directed mostly with helping the poor and elderly people from the Jewish community. It provides them with food, medical and social care and many other services. Many people decide to be part of the institution and thus participate in cultural events mostly because of the opportunity to get necessary products. Also, Rabbi Glitsenstein, while organizing the club-room for teenagers, offered a scholarship for the best students. Thus, the economic position of national institutions often causes tensions between them. This is especially visible in the Jewish case as there are four main institutions directed towards the Jewish community who struggle over the control of resources and people themselves. The personal ties and networks are so strong that

individuals from Chernivtsi clearly know where they can go and where in the same time should not.

Becoming national

Ethnicity is not only a domain of discourse, categorization schemas, and individual choices, it is also an embodied knowledge experienced through social practice. Although in a variety of social situations, people do not stress their sense of ethnic identification, in some it still becomes very visible. In some social situations *groupness* is the most important element in stressing an individual's ethnic identification.

Vyshyvanka – the traditional folk Ukrainian shirt - is a part of wardrobe of almost everyone in Western Ukraine. In the country it became extremely popular in the middle of 1990s. In most of the cases it is a white or black shirt with embroidered sleeves and small collar. People wear it on special family celebrations (baptisms, weddings, and anniversaries) and on most important national and religious holidays (Independence Day, Easter, and Christmas). For each married couple it is almost obligatory fashion to have photo session in embroidery clothes, especially in the open-air museum. It is an interesting shift in celebrating “Ukrainianess.” During the Soviet era, folk and peasant symbols as well as the Ukrainian language were neglected and associated with lower status. Since 1991 these elements have become a source of positive self-esteem and pride mostly in Western Ukraine. Many of the people with whom I talked in Chernivtsi or Lviv stress that in Eastern Ukraine they do not know this tradition, and together with the widespread usage of Russian, it is the most important element or “Russian” marker of the region.” What is interesting, the state recently invented a new public holiday “The Day of Vyshyvanka” during which it is positively seen to wear *vyshyvanka*, the newly established tradition become especially popular among pupils and students and streets are full of well-dressed people. Different patterns of embroidery entered a variety of aspects of everyday life. This symbol is used in TV commercials, put on products, presents, tablecloths, and in almost each apartment, the painting of Taras Shevchenko is covered by an embroidered towel. Sometimes even on national holidays, monuments are covered by embroidered fabric.³¹

However, in Chernivtsi, people celebrate not only their “Ukrainianess”. In some cases, although very limited, *groupness* is built by national elites and reflects the mainstream national myths. Recently, one of the most important events for the Jewish community was the opening of new synagogue on the 25th of September 2011 by the Chabad community. The ceremony started in the local cinema – the previous Temple. It used to be the greatest city's synagogue in the beginning of the 20th century. Although the Chabad community, whose members came to the city in the middle of 1990s, do not have much in common with these times, the organizers decided to start the ceremony in the old Temple, thus creating a link between past and present. On this day, the streets of Chernivtsi became full of dancing rabbis and Jews who came from Israel and other parts of Ukraine. From Chernivtsi mostly people interested in Jewish culture, scholars, writers and museum workers attended. As for them, this was “the greatest day in history,” a sign of the renewal of Jewish culture. However, only some small groups formed the causal visitors of local Jewish institutions. This is only one of the public events I have recorded which referred to celebrations other than “Ukrainian” ones. In

other cases, people performed their ethnicity in more informal circles connected with events organized by national institutions.

Once I participated in the Purim holiday, organized for women by the Chabad community. As mentioned before, Lesya took me there in order to show the specificity of the group formed by Rabbi Glitsenstein and his wife. Everyone was friendly through chatting and laughter. The Rabbi's wife organized different games (dress up in costumes and choosing the queen Ester), gave a lecture about the sense of happiness, and prepared a traditional dinner. As my friend concluded: "she [the Rabbi's wife] is a true Jew, because she wears a wig, has four children but is slim and always looks good. She has always her house in order and cooks traditional food."

Also, the Catholic Church organizes some events, mostly small Church markets in which the Catholic community gathered for a barbecue and singing. However, although the church is perceived as a Polish, here the common language is Ukrainian and there is nothing specifically "Polish" in the events.

Conclusion

Talking, choosing, performing and consuming (described by me as becoming) the nation are four ways through which nationhood is produced and reproduced in an everyday context. They show that although 'hot nationalism' is not the case in many communities, the powerful and significant aspects of 'salient ethnicity' are present in many forms and situations in the way ordinary people see themselves and others.

The primary aim of this article was to show why and when ethnicity as a category of practice matters for ordinary people in one Ukrainian town. Chernivtsi is an example of a place in which, after 20 years of constant marking of "Ukrainianess" in every aspect of everyday life, it became an unmarked, obvious, and taken for granted category for ordinary people. This means that in the way individuals talk, act and perform, they naturally and almost automatically reused and renegotiated "Ukrainianess." In this sense, alternative minority identifications serve as a tool to obtain certain "external" goals, such as getting a *Polish card*, or Romanian citizenship, or at least to be able to go abroad. Thus, the different national myths imposed by elites do not pose a threat to the mainstream "Ukrainization" efforts.

However, one should also take into consideration the particular methodological basis of my work. As an anthropologist, I focused on everyday, routine expressions visible in a number of social situations. Bearing in mind the complexity of defining the concept of the everyday, my main aim was to analyze its "situational" aspects. I therefore wanted to show why and when people spontaneously express themselves along ethnic lines. By stressing the importance of face-to-face contact and different social settings in which ethnicity may "happen," it shows how fluid and changeable this category is. In this sense, ethnicity is perceived as a mental schema, as a discursive practice, and as embodied knowledge.

As I presented, in a number of social situations, such as reading newspapers, watching TV programs, talking, participating in public events and so on, individuals almost automatically reused the category of "Ukrainianess." As I showed, this is mostly because of the privileged position of the Ukrainian language, which seems as though it dominates each

sphere of life. Thus, people who use *Surzyk* or Romanian are the subjects of stereotyping talks and ethnically framed prejudices.

It might be concluded that through the shift in the everyday life, the marked category of “Ukrainianess” became an unmarked and taken for granted category for ordinary people. It is a sign of successful nationalizing efforts of the Ukrainian state. However, the institutional revival and the growing power of the cosmopolitan myth, especially among the members of Jewish community, suggest that in the future the character of interethnic relations in Chernivtsi might change, making the case of this Ukrainian town even more interesting for future anthropological investigations.

Notes

¹ This article is partially based on my Masters thesis: *Celebrating difference, becoming Ukrainian. Everyday ethnicity in a mixed Ukrainian town* submitted to the Nationalism Studies Program, Central European University in Budapest and in the fulfillment of a research grant given by the Polish National Science Centre, no 2012/07/N/HS3/04169 realized at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin. Poland.

² In this regard, a very interesting project on the problem of regional identifications, with L’viv and Donetsk as case studies, was conducted by an interdisciplinary team of Ukrainian scholars. Results were published in the special edition of the journal *Ukraina Moderna, L’viv –Donetsk: social identities in modern Ukraine*, edited by Yaroslav Hrytsak, Andrija Portnov and Viktor Susak. Kiev-L’viv 2007.

³ All data from State Statistics Service of Ukraine, title: “All-Ukrainian population census” conducted in 2001, accessed September 10, 2009, <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/ukr/notice/news.php?type=2&id1=21>.

⁴ According to the mentioned census in 2001 among around 220 thousand citizens, there were 189 021 Ukrainians, 10 553 Romanians, 1408 Poles and 1308 Jews. What is interesting is that none of statistics include the Roma people. Little is also known about their cultural specificity, history and inhabited places in Chernivtsi’s district. They are also invisible in public space. However, according to some estimates made by activists centered around the Ukrainian National House, there are around two thousands Roma living nearby the city. As far as I know, there is no institution in the city which is exclusively dealing with them.

⁵ Chernivtsi and Northern Bukovina are known also because of its multiethnic history and shifted borders. In the past Bukovina used to be a part of the Kyivan-Rus (885-1340), the Kingdom of Poland (1340-1514) and the Principality of Moldavia (1514-1775). However, in these two periods, the Bukovina region was highly unstable, mostly by the complicated Polish-Moldovan relations, but also influenced by Hungarian and Turkish military expansions. The period of stability came together with the Austro-Hungarian rule when the city was named *Czernowitz* (1775-1918). In the interwar period Bukovina became part of Greater Romania with the new name *Cernătu* (1918-1940 and 1941-45), then the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic - *Chernovtsy* (1945-1991) and from 1991 the Independent Ukraine with its modern name – *Chernivtsi* (Kaindl 2003).

⁶ As I mentioned before, four nationalities (Ukrainians, Romanian, Poles and Jews) are characterized by institutional continuation in the city's history. However, it does not mean that their communities themselves have it. In the case of Jews, the tragic events of the Second World War and mass migrations afterwards – old populace from Chernivtsi and mostly Bessarabia Jews to the city cause that the present population living in the city has barely any connection with the local Jewish heritage. Most of the Romanians emigrated from the city after the Second World War. In this regard, there are no estimates to what extent the current Romanians living in the city are the descendants of those who stayed, Ukrainians who use the possibility to change their passports or Moldovans for whom Romanian identification is very often much more convenient. According to Wojciech Krynski (2006) Poles came to the city in four waves beginning in the 14th century. As for him, most members of the local community left Ukraine after the Second World War and settled in the Lower Silesia region of Poland. However, my research among locals who identify themselves as Poles shows that most of them came to the city in the 1950s and 1970s from other parts of the Soviet Union, and especially Siberia. One cannot find continuity also in Ukrainian group. Most of the present day Ukrainians who live in the city came here from the Bukovinian countryside in connection with the city's industrialization after the Second World War, later development and then establishment of the open-air market. In the case of Chernivtsi, the sense of continuity is important as it is widely used by local national elites in their projects and policies directed towards national communities. However, in most cases, those actions are not understandable by people who barely participate in it.

⁷ The case of the city center revitalization in 2008 showed two contradictory processes. The first was admiration of the past cosmopolitan character by highlighting all aspects of the Austrian presence in the city (eclectic architecture, monuments, public houses and so on), and the emphasis put on the Ukrainian character of the city. The process of revitalization was commented on in local municipal newspaper. In every issue there was a story connected with a revitalized place – in almost all cases, the story was related to a Ukrainian person.

⁸ I have conducted my fieldwork in Chernivtsi in three phases. First, from February till May 2010, I investigated the variety of Jewish institutions operating in the town. I conducted participant observation among the members of the Hesed Shushana Foundation, the Chabad movement, and interviewed the members of the Jewish National House, the Jewish Museum of History and Culture of Bukovinian Jews, and authorities from the local municipality. The second phase of my fieldwork took place from May 2011 till February 2012. At that time, besides the continuation of previous observations, I conducted fieldwork among the Polish community gathered close to the local Catholic Church and the Polish National House. Furthermore, I interviewed members of the Romanian National House. At the moment, I have entered the third phase of my research, which focuses on the problem of the socio-cultural transition observed in the city.

⁹ Although I do not have place here to develop the question of competing national myths in Chernivtsi, it should be stress that they play an important role in the national elites' discourse but less in the everyday life of ordinary people. The various forms of the cosmopolitan myth seem to be present in the description of many cities in Ukraine. However, significant are two examples with which Chernivtsi share many similarities, namely L'viv (Czaplicka 2005) and Odesa (Richardson 2008).

¹⁰ Fredrik Barth (1969) was one of the first scholars who stressed the situational character of ethnicity, constructed through social boundaries. By “social situation”, according to Jonathan Y. Okamura (1981), I mean the face-to-face relationship of individuals. For this scholar, ethnicity is “situationally determined”, and in some situations it is a relevant factor which influences the interaction while in others it can be fully meaningless. It is always a matter of the individual’s decision in which group he/she wants to be member. Thus, ethnicity should be understood through subjective patterns of the individual’s everyday ethnic self-ascription and categorization but also embodies aspects of this knowledge through which ethnicity becomes visible.

¹¹ At this point, a few explanations should be provided on my use of the term ethnicity and nationhood. Throughout the paper, I many times use both interchangeably. I claim that in routine expressions of everyday life, it is quite difficult to divide them, and state where ethnicity ends and nationhood starts. However, I refer to the ordinary people’s experiences, perceptions, and actions many times in response to their interactions with other citizens of Chernivtsi or the elites’ discourse. Thus, I will not focus on the state, local, elites policy distinctively, whose activity and presence I would mostly describe through the ‘nationess’ lens. Moreover, following Fowkes’ (2002) ideas, as a cultural anthropologist who bases his research on everyday participant observation, I am more likely to use the term ethnicity (and interested in cultural expressions) rather than nationhood. However, I bear in mind that there is a long scholarly differentiation and theoretical understanding of both nationhood and ethnicity.

¹² For Rogers Brubaker (2006), the unmarked category is the normal, obvious, taken-for-granted category, while the marked category is special, different or simply the “other.” It should be stress that in some social situations, one category can be marked while in others unmarked. In the case of Chernivtsi and the everyday ethnicity approach, it is very important to understand this distinction. In some situations, such ethnic categories as “Romanian”, “Jewish”, “Polish”, “Ukrainian” are marked while in others they are unmarked – and other categories connected with social class, employment, age or gender are more visible.

¹³ The sense of *groupness* is explained by Rogers Brubaker (2000) in his article on identity and refers to spontaneous and situational forms of collective identifications.

¹⁴ <http://buktolerance.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/broshura.pdf>, accessed May 21, 2013.

¹⁵ By Jewish school I mean that it was established and financed by a Ukrainian Jewish Organization which aimed to educate people of Jewish origin about their religious tradition and language. However, because of the good financial situation of the school as well as the high education level, the school is very popular in the city among other. To the issue of Jewish schools, I come back in later part.

¹⁶ In the beginning of the 1990s there were attempts to open a multinational university in Chernivtsi, which actually supposed to be Romanian (Hungarian University in Cluj Napoca served here as a model). However, because of some economic and political reasons, it has never happened.

¹⁷ Among which 35.5 hours for Romanian language, 0.2 for Polish and Yiddish – 0.3 hour. See: <http://buktolerance.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/broshura.pdf>, accessed May 21, 2013.

¹⁸ They were all established during the Austro-Hungarian time. However, throughout the Soviet period, they did not work.

¹⁹ The literature on the cosmopolitan myth of Czernowitz refers to the time of the city's belonging to the Austro-Hungarian period and focus mostly on its Jewish inhabitants. Interestingly, it is more popular among foreign authors than local ones. See for example Corbea-Hoisie (2003) Cordon and Husdat (2008), Czyżewski (2008), Hirsch and Spitzer (2011), Klaus (2008), Scherzer (2005), and Shevchenko (2004).

²⁰ Architecture, street names, monuments and memorial boards are interesting examples through which one can investigate not only asymmetries in public space but especially various forms of local politics of memory. In the case of Ukraine, the last issue was introduced by Catherine Wanner (1998) and her research on the relation between public space and the nationalization efforts of Ukrainian state. A very interesting comparative work on contemporary forms and the role of memory in variety of Ukrainian cities is also provided by a group of Ukrainian sociologists who formed the socio-cultural approach in urban studies. See: Socjologija mista (2010).

²¹ One of the most common topics for conversation, especially with me as a foreigner, was travelling and going abroad. People especially in my age group complained of how hard it was for them to go abroad (because of the visa regime) and how tired they were of living in Ukraine. Elderly people very often stressed that they used to work in Poland or they asked me about current political and economic issues connected with European Union accession. Very often, they asked me about the quality of roads in Poland (in order to complain about their own in Ukraine).

²² *Surzyk* is a popular mix of Russian and Ukrainian (in most of the cases by using Russian words in Ukrainian grammatical structures). Both languages are very similar and belong to the same Slavic language family. Thus, normally it does not pose a problem when in conversation one person use Russian and the other Ukrainian. For more data on the usage of *Surzyk* see Bilaniuk (2006).

²³ There are no clear distinctions between Romanians and Moldovans in the city. The latter are perceived as a kind of subgroup of Romanians but nowadays connected with the neighboring country – The Republic of Moldova. However, by both groups I talked to – Ukrainians and Romanians – Moldovans are associated with lower social status. Even in the Ukrainian language there is an expression *buty jak Moldovan*, which means that somebody does not behave or look properly.

²⁴ At some point in my research I noticed that I need to know the basis of the Russian language in order to communicate freely in Chernivtsi. This language was important in my conversation mostly in local Jewish and Romanian organizations.

²⁵ From 2008 the project “Mirror of history” has been organized in the local Jewish cemetery. The event gathers volunteers mostly from Europe who during two weeks in Chernivtsi, clean

the cemetery, meet with local authorities and discover the Jewish past of the town. The project is organized by “Svit Ukraina”, nongovernmental organization from Ukraine and with support of *Czernowitz-L*, which is a mailing list of former Jewish citizens of Czernowitz. As researcher, I participated in the workcamp in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

²⁶ It was one of the reactions of my friend, a local journalist in Chernivtsi, while I was talking with her about the festival Meridian Czernowitz, organized in Chernivtsi since 2009.- The festival is perceived as a great event in the town especially for its promotion outside. My friend, however, did not want to talk about it. She just pointed out that *again these Jews*, showing her distaste for the publicized form of event and describing the high budget of it.

²⁷ I notice it in two kinds of situations. One in which, because of my knowledge of Ukrainian, I spoke in this language while my interlocutor used Russian. In most of the cases for this person it was not a problem to both understand me and prolong the discussion. However, it posed some difficulties for me as my understanding of Russian is not as good as Ukrainian. The second kind of situations are those when I heard people talking with each other by mixing both languages.

²⁸ Next to language, clothes (the popular black tracksuit), and ways of behaving (being too noisy, the uses of swear words and eating sunflower seeds) are perceived as the most common markers of both rural newcomers and Moldovans in the eyes of my interlocutors. However, I need to stress that “obvious” for my interlocutors differences in clothes and behavior were not so clear for me as I could not distinguish people in this sense and make any kind of “guessing” who might be who based on these “objective” elements.

²⁹ These kinds of statements about Moldovans I heard from a number of my friends in Chernivtsi.

³⁰ Rabbi Mendel belongs to the Chabad Lubavitch movement. He came to Chernivtsi in the beginning of the 1990s with his family in order to gather the Jewish community. He opened the club-room for teenagers and organized weekly meetings for adults. He also initiated the renovation of local synagogue.

³⁰ On the importance of *vyshyvanka* in the commemoration of national holidays see Wanner (1991)

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