

# The Resilience of Soviet Ethnicity Concepts in a Post-Soviet Society: Studying the Narratives and Techniques that Maintain Ethnic Boundaries

*Simon Schlegel*

## Introduction

This paper examines prevailing concepts of ethnicity in a rural post-Soviet setting. It draws on fieldwork in one of Ukraine's most ethnically diverse regions, southern Bessarabia, a part of the Odessa Oblast in the southwestern tip of the country. In this region, ethnicity is most often referred to as an inner disposition that reveals itself to an observer through visible traits, patterns of behavior, or mere sensation. People can give elaborate explanations of how they see, detect, or sense the ethnic identity of others. If ethnic identity is essential and an undeniable characteristic of each person, then it must be somehow predefined and located someplace; the blood, the bones, the psyche, or the mentality are frequently suspected loci. There must be techniques to reveal such inner dispositions, and there must be narratives that explain how they affect the way people behave. So where is ethnic essence located and how does it act out? This paper is meant to list and discuss the narratives and techniques that answer this question in southern Bessarabia.

This region is especially well suited to study how ethnic boundaries emerge and are maintained. Southern Bessarabia has belonged to five different states over the course of the past two centuries<sup>1</sup> and has remained at the periphery of each. When in 1812 the territory of what later became the Oblast of Bessarabia was conquered by Russia from the Ottoman Empire, the mostly nomadic population of the region's southern steppes was expelled and replaced by agricultural settlers, many of whom were Christians from the Ottoman Balkan Provinces (Kushko and Taki 2012: 164). They were the ancestors of today's Bulgarian, Gagauz, and Albanian minorities in southern Bessarabia. These groups live close to and in perpetual exchange with Russians, Ukrainians, and Moldovans. Often one group forms a predominant majority in a village or a neighborhood, but there are no discrete ethnic territories. Today, the most common language in public is Russian. Most people were schooled in Russian and therefore the majority of people feel most confident in that language.<sup>2</sup>

I spent fifteen months in this region in late 2012 and through 2013, doing field research on the emergence and maintenance of ethnic boundaries between these groups. In the small Danube port town of Izmail and in four villages in its vicinity, I took thirty-four in-depth biographical interviews with elderly respondents, asking them how ethnicity had influenced the opportunities and obstacles they encountered in the course of their lives. In addition, I conducted sixteen expert interviews with politicians, historians, museum staff, activists, and educators. Interviewing was combined with archival study of state documents from the region's Russian, Romanian, and Soviet pasts. Participant observation during various political and cultural events, as well as a systematic study of the local press completed the methodological toolbox.

Although Bessarabia has been an ethnically diverse region since its integration into the Russian Empire, ethnicity only gradually became a political factor. Scholars and writers from Russia's main cities, starting from the mid-19th century, began to develop an exotic fascination with their culturally different subjects on the southwestern periphery. However, for state policies, their Christian faith and social status as state peasants mattered more. Ethnicity became much more central

to people's fates under the reign of Romania and later the Soviet Union. Both states ascribed ethnic categories to their subjects and developed specific policies towards each ethnic group. Some of these policies were harshly discriminatory, like the wartime "labor front" (*trudovoy front*),<sup>3</sup> a Soviet euphemism for forced labor (Brandes, Sundhaussen, and Troebst 2010). In this region, the "labor front" targeted mainly Bulgarians and Gagauz.

Administrative practices relying on ethnic distinctions were backed up by theoretical concepts that treated ethnicity as a discreetly bounded and objectively discernible category. This paradigm was disseminated through the Soviet school system and adult education programs. All Soviet concepts of ethnicity, nationality, or the nation assumed that identifying the members of such groups was an objective evaluation of a few criteria, each of which was independent of individual choices. The list of criteria fluctuated somewhat over the decades: In Sergey Shirokogorov's 1922 definition, they included a common language, an awareness of commonality, a shared complex of social mores, modes of life, and traditions (cited in Tishkov 1997: 2). Stalin, in his own definition of a nation (*natsiya*) used a very similar list but added long cohabitation in a common territory, which he thought resulted in a common psychological make-up (Stalin 1994: 20). Pavel Kushner in his 1951 definition of *ethnos* added religious beliefs and specified the common characteristics must be visible in everyday-culture (*byt*) which he also believed to be a result of long cohabitation (Kushner 1951: 6). The most influential figure in Brezhnev era ethnography, Yulian Bromley, added an ethnonym as a compulsory ingredient to his own *ethnos* definition (1980 154). He stressed that traits needed to be stable and that their unity needed to be commonly recognized. All of these definitions were suitable to justify ethnically-specific policies in the Soviet Union. They enabled Soviet bureaucrats to assume the population they administered was a conglomerate of clearly bounded ethnic groups, each with a discrete culture and specific political needs. However, essentializing concepts of ethnicity stuck long after these policies and the Soviet state were gone.

## **Narratives and techniques**

If ethnic belonging is somehow predefined, as Soviet definitions implied, then there must be something within a person that encodes information about ethnic identity. Making predictions of how an innate ethnic identity would act out in a person's behavior would require some degree of specialized knowledge. Gelman and Wellman define essence as "the unique, typically hidden property of an object that makes it what it is, without which it would have a different identity (e.g., the chemical composition of water, the DNA structure of an elephant)" (Gelman and Wellman 1991: 214-215). They observe that to understand even relatively trivial but non-obvious facts of life, such as that glass chips are not diamonds or that dolphins are not fish, we need a degree of learned expertise about qualities inside the object we analyze. So the very assumption of an essence requires a narrative to demonstrate or explain it, and if we want to reveal a disclosed essence (which is not always possible), some sort of technique is needed. Such techniques and narratives rely on cultural practices determined by a locality and its history. The following analysis of fieldwork materials is an attempt to itemize recorded narratives about the location of ethnic essence inside a person and the techniques of how it might be revealed.

Narratives, as I use the term here, imply a story that is "... attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro- or macro- stories. (...) Public narratives range from the narratives of one's family, to those of the workplace (organizational myths), church, government, and nation" (Somers 1994: 619). Narratives, as they manifest themselves in ethnographic fieldwork are retold in

similar or identical versions by different people and at different times with the aim of bringing across the same or similar arguments. These narratives can be based wholly or partly on true stories; they can be ad-hoc collages of earlier narratives, or they can be deliberate lies. In other words, they can be any illustrative tale that reoccurs similarly in form and intention.

Techniques to make ethnic markers seen and thereby to maintain ethnic boundaries are more subtle. They include any reoccurring patterns of behavior that mark ethnic boundaries. They can be intentional or unintentional, explicit or implicit. Such techniques are tied to social norms that are self-imposed or demand compliance from others. Because such norms usually exist outside the codified law, they can be employed as it best fits the respective situation. Many people have no manifest desire to maintain ethnic boundaries but do so unintentionally. Others loudly champion ethnic boundary maintenance but may not always act accordingly. The narratives and techniques I am interested in here are the ones that contribute to ethnic boundary maintenance regardless of intention.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion**

The lowest common denominator of all techniques to maintain ethnic boundaries is to claim a certain characteristic as typical within an ethnic group, while omitting that it is similarly typical outside an ethnic boundary. Fredrik Barth found this technique typical in efforts to maintain ethnic boundaries:

The boundary schema (...) constructs an assumption of shared homogeneity within the group and cultural difference between groups, with great potential consequences for the social life of larger communities and regions (Barth 2000, 30).

This may be done with a characteristic seen as a positive feature of one particular ethnic group, such as passion, industriousness, or generosity. But perfectly banal practices can just as well serve as ethnic markers with this technique. As an illustration, let me cite the example of hand towels, a profane item that can be employed to demarcate ethnic boundaries if embedded in a specific kind of narrative. Hand towels are used in many cultures around the world in similar ways. Without even denying this trivial observation, it is possible to elevate the use of the hand towel as a marker of a particular ethnic identity if one wishes to do so. All one needs to do is to claim that inside an ethnic group everyone uses hand towels in a specific way (or at least traditionally did so, in an unspecified past, when people still used to act according to principles unique to their ethnic group). At the same time, one can just remain silent about identical or similar practices outside the ethnic group. This technique, applied on the hand towel example, was used by Oleksandra Serbens'ka, a prominent Ukrainian educator<sup>4</sup> in a Ukrainian language reader designed for Russian-speakers (Serbens'ka and Terlak 1999), most grammar exercises in this volume contain patriotic motives or are based on poetry from the era of romantic nationalism. One particularly interesting exercise on the use of participles employs a text entitled *the Ukrainian hand towel*. While on the lookout for participles the Russian-speaking student reads:

A sign of cleanliness and industriousness of every housewife is a tidy house and a clean hand towel. It is a custom all over Ukraine to cover bread on the table with a hand towel (Serbens'ka and Terlak 1999, 152).

The practices in this excerpt are not particularly Ukrainian. In fact, no matter where people use hand towels, their cleanliness can be interpreted as an index for a tidy house. Also, the familiar

fact that a loaf of bread remains fresh longer under a piece of cloth makes hand towels likely to cover bread wherever the two items occur together. But in this use as an ethnic marker, the hand towel, its cleanliness, and use to keep bread fresh, become charged with a meaning beyond the material function of the item. This meaning, the author then claims, exists “all over Ukraine.” We do not know from the cited text whether it also exists beyond Ukraine, but the neglect of everything outside the realm of Ukraine creates the impression that caring about the tidiness of hand towels or using them to cover bread stops at the Ukrainian border.

A more local example refers to Bessarabian Bulgarians and their alleged industriousness. Beginning with early ethnographic descriptions, Bessarabian Bulgarians are renowned for, and pride themselves on their industriousness (Moshkov 1901; Derzhavin 1914). Abstract qualities like industriousness or hot-bloodedness (a quality often ascribed to the Gagauz, who in some cases proudly accept the ascription) are hard to substantiate or measure and therefore do not usually have to be proven. It is sufficient to prove that everyone *knows* about these characteristics among different ethnic groups. The leader of the Association of the Bulgarians of Ukraine, Anton Kisse, a member of the Ukrainian Parliament, refers to the alleged Bulgarian industriousness in his widely disseminated book *The Renaissance of the Bulgarians in Ukraine*. In the chapter *the Father's House and the Homeland* he points out:

As long as I can think, the [father's] house was constantly upgraded and renovated. Later, I learned from reading one of the explorers that house construction is a distinguishing feature of the Bulgarians. Ask any Bulgarian how many rooms there are in his house. As a rule, he will answer with a delay, trying to think of all the rooms he ought to know about. But then he names the number... it is often more than ten. And all that because renovations and extensions are going on almost constantly (Kisse 2006, 31).

By omitting that most village houses in Bessarabia--built from mud bricks and rush mats--require constant mending, no matter the ethnicity of their tenants, the author reinforces an ethnic boundary between Bulgarians and the unnamed other. Probably no one will systematically conduct the experiment suggested in the excerpt: to ask a large sample of Bulgarians the number of rooms in their houses.

But stereotypes are not meant to be examined; they have a series of inbuilt maintenance mechanisms that makes it difficult to revise them even in the face of contradicting evidence. In their review of the psychological literature on stereotypes, Hilton and von Hippel have concluded that stereotypes are so stable because we assimilate events with categories already familiar to us, because we tend to perceive an out-group more homogenous than it actually is and because we select our memories in such a way that they correlate with our stereotypes (Hilton and von Hippel, 1996). Therefore, the reason why the experiment in Kisse's book, to count the rooms in Bulgarian houses, was never conducted was not because the result would have been considered uninteresting, but because what everybody knows, needs no proof.

If proof for stereotypes is pointless, it is still good to have at least a sketch of a theory that explains why members of certain ethnic groups are the way they are said to be. The locus of ethnic essence is of eminent interest in justifying a stereotype. My fieldwork data from southern Bessarabia suggests five systems in which ethnic essence is assumed: language, religious beliefs, common historical experience, folklore, and DNA. Each of these provides the basis for a strand of narratives of what ethnic essence consists of, and the basis for a technique of inclusion and exclusion used to maintain ethnic boundaries. The remainder of this paper is structured by a discussion of each of these realms.

## Language

Language is arguably the most significant marker of ethnic boundaries in southern Bessarabia and throughout the former Soviet Union. Linguistic differences in many cases were directly translated into ethnic boundaries in Soviet nationality policy. On the other hand, language is also perceived as a viable candidate to be the bearer of ethnic essence, because anything we do can be thought and discussed only using language. Since thoughts are encoded in language and behavior is based on thoughts, it can be influenced by language as well as the metaphors and wisdom engraved in a linguistic tradition. If two groups of people use different languages and are perceived to behave differently, one obvious explanation is that the different languages they use are at the roots of their differing behavioral patterns. One Bulgarian language teacher for instance explained that psychology derived from language directly.<sup>5</sup> The Gagauz, she said, were slightly more aggressive than the Bulgarians, given the large amount of words for fighting and warfare in their lexicon. The Bulgarians had more words for love and tenderness in their vocabulary and therefore behaved accordingly. Because we do what we think, she argued, the language in which our thoughts are thought influences how we act. The idea, that the language we know best forces us to behave in certain manners sounds like a folk version of the famous Whorf-Sapir hypothesis (Whorf 1956). The hypothesis and its derivations have been thoroughly disproven. It is our culture that lets us coin specific linguistic forms, not our language that makes us act in specific ways (McWhorter 2014). But the idea that people are forced to act in a specific way by their linguistic inventory, feels especially ill-conceived in an area, where most people speak at least two languages to some extent. An important part of the linguistic determinism paradigm in southern Bessarabia seems to be that every person has a *true* native language that exerts influence on his or her mind beyond that of any other language learned later.

But how can one find out in which language a person's *true* identity is engraved? One technique that was suggested in several instances was to look at moments of unconscious speech. One man of Bulgarian and Gagauz descent said he knew for sure that he was a *real* Bulgarian after a stay in a hospital, during which his roommate overheard him speak Bulgarian in his delirious sleep.<sup>6</sup> In another episode of the interview this man named drunkenness or great pain as conditions in which the *true* ethnic nature of a person reveals itself. In these situations, people are unable to deliberately choose a linguistic code and therefore use the one that is engraved in their mind most deeply. The informant here specifically referred to a scene in the popular Soviet spy series *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (1973), in which a female Soviet spy in Nazi Germany is uncovered while giving birth, because her agonized screams betray her native language. To people who believe in the effectiveness of this technique, it does not matter how many languages a person learns to speak and how fluent they become in them. The language learnt first remains the one formative for their *true* identity, the one people fall back on when they lose the ability to conceal who they are *in essence*.

Following from the assumption that ethnic identity is engraved in a language, the most obvious of all forms to keep ethnic boundaries clear-cut is to demand, from all those willing to be identified with a particular ethnic denominator, to use a pure form of one particular linguistic code in all social spheres and situations. The Ukrainian and Russian languages have long traditions, both of linguistic mixing and of linguistic purism. Language varieties that dissolve the boundary between Russian and Ukrainian are most commonly called *Surzhyk*. To demarcate the linguistic boundary between the Russian and the Ukrainian standard languages, there is a time-honored practice to shame the mixing of languages (Bilaniuk 2005; Bernsand 2006). Shaming builds on the assumption that there are pure and authentic ethnic communities that speak pure and authentic languages.

These languages are perceived to be best suited for the ethnic group in question. Language purists build their activism on the postulation of a hierarchy where pure language varieties are at the top and all other varieties are measured against them.

Because language seems to be perceived as one of the most essential markers of ethnic identity, linguistic purity has become a major concern for those who use language as an ethnic marker. With language mixing, notions of dirt or impurity are never far. Most informants name “clean language” (*chistiy yazyk*) as the opposite of Surzhyk. By clean language they mean the standardized varieties of either Ukrainian or Russian. One Odessa language teacher said speaking Surzhyk was like walking around in untidy clothes. Other Odessa informants said that hearing Surzhyk “hurts in my ears” or “bangs my psyche.” The abhorrence for language mixing seems to be a very real sensation to many people in Ukraine. Most of my informants believed that speaking Surzhyk was a sign of low social status and of rural origin. Yet many representatives of the country’s political elite become Surzhyk speakers when they unsuccessfully pretend that Ukrainian is their first language. Such politicians are a favorite target of Ukrainian comedians.

The degree of impurity, however, is often in the eye of the beholder. People are sometimes quick to classify the language of others as impure and mark it with the label Surzhyk. At the same time, many people admit that their own language is not perfectly pure, but overwhelmingly reject the etiquette of Surzhyk. Public ridicule, ridiculing prominent Surzhyk speakers, the association of language mixing with dirtiness, with rural-urban migration, and poor education are all mechanisms that force people to either deny that they speak Surzhyk, or (very rarely) to actually purify their language. If people do so, they also must decide for one out of several possible *pure* languages. This choice forces people to take sides in the never-ending debate about the appropriate language in Ukraine. By taking sides, they sharpen the boundary between two languages, probably the strongest identifier in Ukrainian society

## **Religion**

Religion is rarely a reliable marker of ethnic boundaries. This is also true in southern Bessarabia. Before World War II, Jews and Bessarabian Germans were two local groups, whose ethnic difference from the rest of the population was primarily marked by faith. Save for the still remaining Old-Believers, who settle in villages along the channels of the Danube Delta, the overwhelming majority of all the other groups in the region are Orthodox Christians. Among the Orthodox groups, considerable numbers have recently turned to evangelical congregations or to Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. In many villages, the old Orthodox churches have been destroyed in Soviet times and were never rebuilt. After the iron curtain fell, prayer houses, financed by foreign churches, were established in most villages. Nevertheless, like language, religious beliefs and practices are perceived to leave an imprint on a person’s character, no matter what religious forms they adopt in the course of their lives. One informant suggested that a “psychological make-up” remains within a person descended from a specific religious community, even after conversion to a different creed. In an interview with two young men in Izmail, one of whom said he was Orthodox while the other had converted to a New-Age practice, the Orthodox man said that even if one converted, one would remain Orthodox by *ethno-psychology*. This was something that every person had and that could not be discarded, regardless of how hard one pretended. However, the boundaries marked by religion always remain wider than the ethnic boundaries between local ethnic groups in multiethnic regions.

If Orthodoxy alone cannot mark local ethnic boundaries, it is certainly suited to mark the realms of religious institutions, associated with different camps of Ukrainian politics. In 1992 the Kyiv Patriarchate branched off from the Moscow Patriarchate, in order to give the newly independent polity of Ukraine an independent religious hierarchy. Most parishes in southern and eastern Ukraine remained with the Moscow Patriarchate, which in some instances led to fierce conflicts over church property and doctrine. One quarrel between the two patriarchates was fought over the language used in liturgy. The Moscow Patriarchate sees Church Slavonic as the appropriate language, while the Kyiv Patriarchate insists on using the language of the people (i.e. Ukrainian), pointing to the examples of the Georgian, Cypriot, or Greek Orthodox Churches (Wilson 2002: 243). In southern Bessarabia, practically all parishes belong to the Moscow Patriarchate. Most priests, independently of the predominant ethnicity of their parish, use Church Slavonic for the liturgy, while the language used in the sermon can differ. Differences between village parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate may be just as large as differences between parishes belonging to different Patriarchates. So belonging to different branches of the Orthodox Church may be a viable technique to mark ethnic boundaries on the national Ukrainian level but not on the local Bessarabian level.

Being an Orthodox Christian in southern Bessarabia is rather a denominator of a wider Orthodox and conservative community. The Moscow Patriarchate stands for a supra-ethnic community of believers. In some cases, people who are not Orthodox are implicitly excluded from the *real* members of a particular ethnic group. To delineate the Gagauz ethnicity, for instance, Orthodox Christianity is frequently cited as one of the pillars of Gagauz identity, even by Gagauz who themselves are not religious (Anikin 2009: 23). In turn, this occasionally means that adherents of evangelical congregations can be excluded, for example by lumping them together under the label “sectarians” (*sektanty*). This is as much a pariah-etiquette as that of *Surzhyk*.

Most explicit about being Orthodox as a precondition to take on an ethnicity-like identity are the various Cossack associations. To join the Izmail branch of the Ukrainian Registered Cossacks, one needs to pledge allegiance in Izmail’s Cathedral, swearing that one “will serve God and the people of Ukraine to the final breath.”<sup>7</sup> In order to join the ranks of the Bessarabian Cossack Regiment one needs to be of age and baptized in an Orthodox Church.<sup>8</sup>

One can conclude that religion has come to serve not to distinguish the members of one ethnic group from another. Instead, for some people, the degree of a person’s religiosity helps to distinguish the *real* members of an ethnic group from all the rest. Forcing people to reveal their religious beliefs, if they want to be seen as members of a specific ethnic group, is a potent technique to sharpen ethnic boundaries. It aligns the fuzzy boundary of an ethnic category with the boundaries of a religious category, in which membership is marked by participation in religious rituals. Especially if political patrons have little credentials to represent an ethnic group, they fare better if they parade their religiosity.

### **A shared historical experience**

It is a familiar observation that people who have been through a lot together adopt similar forms of behavior and a spirit of communality. In a classic definition of the *nation* by Ernest Renan, national unity was created, among other things, by the shared memory of struggles lived through together (Renan 1994: 17). In the former Soviet Union, too, a common historical experience was seen as the basis for a common “psychological make-up,” a precondition to call a group a nation

or an ethnos (see the definitions for "nation" by Joseph Stalin,<sup>9</sup> and that for "ethnos" by Yulian Bromley).<sup>10</sup>

Since Ukraine's independence, history has become a focus of national politics and a matter of passionate debate. Therefore, knowledge of an official historical narrative has also become a condition of belonging to the nation (Richardson, 2004: 116). Among ethnic minorities, a set of widely held beliefs about their ethnic group's past serve as explanations for characteristics allegedly unique to the group. Very prominent among these narratives is the idea that the experience of living under Ottoman rule was deeply engraved in the behavior of contemporary Bessarabians. For instance, one frequently mentioned particularity of Bulgarians is their allegedly unique attitude towards women. The leader of the League of Bulgarian Families, a Bulgarian ethnic association in Izmail, called what in her view is the typical Bulgarian attitude towards women, a "cult of the mother and the mother-in-law". She explained the emergence of this specific trait with the century long struggle against the Ottomans: "Because the men..., well [for] five centuries, five hundred years, the men are fighting and the women are in the house, and therefore, naturally, the mother held the whole family together."<sup>11</sup> Two more informants, both of mixed Gagauz and Bulgarian ancestry, pointed out that the often-alleged ethnic endogamy of Bessarabian Bulgarians was a direct consequence of oppression experienced in the Ottoman Empire. A Bulgarian schoolteacher saw this experience as the reason for the alleged reluctance of Bulgarians to marry the Turkic speaking Gagauz.

The narrative of still perceptible consequences of Ottoman oppression is also frequently mentioned in descriptions of Gagauz collective memory. The director of the culture house in a predominantly Gagauz village, when explaining the differences between Gagauz and Bulgarian folk songs, said the Gagauz songs were more melancholic than the Bulgarian ones, because the Gagauz had an even lower standing in the Ottoman pecking order. In all these explanations, a long gone social order has become an allegedly stable characteristic of Bulgarians, Gagauz, Moldovans, and of the relations between them.

In this perception, it seems there is a mechanism that engraves certain cultural traits in the minds of everyone within an ethnic group, even if the formative experience was made by distant ancestors. How was this historical experience passed down the generations? If shared experience is so influential still now, there must be a set of constant and profound practices of memory, which enabled later generations to relive the experiences of their ancestors. Any technique to maintain an ethnic boundary created by common historical experience would therefore include some form of remembrance rituals. They are a vital part of what has been described as commemorative culture (*Erinnerungskultur*): a loose set of practices that are resistant against the findings of academic historiography (Troebst 2006: 69). To be useful in ethnic boundary maintenance, commemorative culture must fulfill two crucial criteria: It must be clear which values and lessons can be drawn from the shared historical events and the historical figures driving them, and the control over the interpretation of history must remain monopolized in the hands of a few. This small group includes the heads of ethnic associations, museum directors, and journalists who have the final say in what kind of past is the shared basis of a common identity.

In southern Bessarabia, each ethnic group, big or small, has their ethnic associations. The declared goal of such organizations is to represent the group's interests vis-à-vis the Ukrainian state. Another important role these organizations have is to define the calendar and content of each ethnic group's commemorative culture. Ethnic associations keep a lid on the symbolic repertoire of each group. In this way each ethnic group was ascribed a small pantheon of heroes and a manageable list of events that mark the turning points in their collective memory. In southern Bessarabia, where



interethnic harmony is a matter of great pride, these lists are usually chosen in such a way that they highlight events and heroes that are uncontroversial and celebrated mainly for their role in the development of one ethnic group. This is counter to, for example, western Ukraine, where marches occur in the regalia of Ukraine's wartime Insurgent Army (UPA), unthinkable in southern Bessarabia except as provocation. Here, the symbols of commemorative culture are usually chosen so that they do not cause fear or hatred among other ethnic groups. Local Ukrainian commemorative culture therefore evolves around the figure of the poet Taras Shevchenko. This does not take away anything from anyone else, still leaving representatives of other ethnic groups the possibility to celebrate their own national heroes. Not only are the pantheons of heroes in local commemorative culture small, but they are also mutually exclusive. In this way the commemorative culture of one ethnic group becomes detached from the commemorative culture of all neighboring ethnic groups. Keeping a close watch on commemorative culture thereby becomes an important technique of ethnic boundary maintenance. Events of more recent history are remembered in a supra-ethnic canon where their regional interpretation is largely uncontroversial. Whereas the victory in World War II is celebrated with pomp, the War in Afghanistan and the reactor catastrophe of Chernobyl are commemorated as tragic but common struggles.

## **Folklore**

Folklore is at the center of another reoccurring narrative in which people of different ethnic identities show different emotional responses to folkloric performances. A history lecturer from the University of Izmil told me a story about an experiment he claimed to have conducted.<sup>12</sup> The story was about an infant boy born to a Russian father and a Gagauz mother. In order to determine the boy's *true* ethnic nature, different brands of folklore music were played to him. The boy, according to the informant, did not show any reactions to either Russian or Ukrainian songs, but when a Gagauz song was played, "his mother had difficulties holding him". This story may well be a cliché, especially because it is a version of a scene from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In one scene, protagonist Nataliya Rostova cannot resist to dance to a Russian folk tune, although she was brought up to French manners (Figs 2002: 17). Even if this was just an old story, retold in what might have been an ad-hoc tale, it does not change the fact that my interlocutor actually believed *real* ethnic belonging could be ascertained by looking at folkloric taste.

Another example comes from a middle-aged Bulgarian teacher from the Bulgarian and Gagauz village of Kubey. He told me, his father was Gagauz and his mother Bulgarian. He had, however, decided that his *true* nature was Bulgarian. When asked how he had reached this conclusion, he explained:

...I am drawn more towards the Bulgarian culture, because it agitates my blood more when there is Bulgarian folklore, music, dances! .... More than the Gagauz ones. That means, in me, there is more of the Bulgarian. I can feel it. It acts out in the blood."<sup>13</sup>

Taste in folklore then is sometimes believed to expose the "true ethnic nature" of people, be they of mixed ethnic origin or not. Since what exactly is the essential core of an ethnic group can hardly be explained rationally, the emotional realm of music is often believed to reflect a specific past and the genius of an ethnic group (Connor 2011: 14). Taste itself can act only as a litmus-test to expose what is believed to be a hidden quality *inside*, where it seems, the essence of ethnicity can be found according to wide-spread assumptions. In this perception, ethnic essence is carried by the

values and morals put across in the songs, dances, and tales in different folkloric traditions, and allegedly these values and morals are different for each ethnic group.

Today, folklore is a vital part of representing ethnicity in public. One technique to mark the border between different forms of folklore is labeling folkloric performance with an ethnicity. The folkloric movement is well organized around clubs and culture houses. Folkloric groups in the Izmail area perform a genre which was described to me by an organizer of folkloric festivals as “processed folklore” (*obrabotanniy fol’klor*).<sup>14</sup> Processed folklore brings pre-modern traditions to the stage in a modern and appealing form. It consists mostly of dances and songs, performed in replicas of historic dresses, shinier and more becoming than they likely were in the time referred to, and to the background of synthesized, prerecorded music.

Solo artists and groups who perform processed folklore usually specialize in the repertoires of one ethnic group. If a collective or an artist is announced on stage, it will also be announced from which town or village they are and which ethnic group they represent. Therefore, the genre is structured and organized along ethnic boundaries. This does not mean that the people belonging to one or other folklore group necessarily need to identify privately with the ethnic group in question. It is more important to stay faithful to the rigid format of the genre (Habeck 2011: 66-67).

Labeling songs and dances with the name of a village and an ethnic group is one central aspect of processing folklore. The processed and performed version of a song or dance may often erase many of the subtleties in its ethnic origins (Cash 2011: 121). Still, usually, one ethnic label is chosen for it. Hence, processed folklore is also a way of processing ethnic boundaries from their subtle and complex expressions found in villager’s songs, dances, and dresses to the clear and shiny form in which they appear on stage. This processing does not keep folklore groups with different ethnic labels from sharing one stage or one festival, or from collaborating with each other. In fact, folklore performances are often used to promote ethnic pluralism (Cash 2011: 12). But each group has its ethnic label attached to their performance.

There are, as one would expect in a multiethnic region, instances of one song being performed in several languages,<sup>15</sup> but I have never witnessed in public performances, someone introducing a song or dance as belonging to several ethnic groups. In a folkloric culture that is so strictly structured by ethnicity, the conclusion that each ethnic culture is essentially different from the others is not a far leap, and from there it is only logical that these essentially different cultures would cause different reactions from people who themselves are inherently different by their inner disposition.

## **Genetics**

Genetics provides a potentially more harmful argument about inner dispositions, starting from the assumption that the essence of ethnicity is biological and enclosed in the genome. Soviet era ethnographers already operated with the term gene and used it as an explanation for ethnic differences (for example, see Arutyunyan 1974: 95) but at the time, wider audiences were still unacquainted with genetics and the nature of DNA. Since then the field of human genetics has made huge progress and the concept of DNA is widely used, although often misleadingly. The appearance of DNA in the vocabulary of those, who delimit ethnic boundaries, seemed to provide the missing link between hard science and a mere sense of being inherently different from the ethnic other. With DNA, a new scientific formula appeared that encoded a person’s inherited traits. DNA clearly was a candidate for the locus of ethnic essence.

Modern technology and genetic know-how can indeed provide a wealth of information about a person’s ancestry<sup>16</sup>. Recently, big-number studies, such as the National Geographic Society’s

Genographic Project, profit from the curiosity of individuals who send in samples of their DNA in order to learn about their own ancestry.<sup>17</sup> Our knowledge about early settlement patterns of humans clearly profited from genetics and large scale research projects. The Genographic project can, with some justification, promise to reveal “which branch of the human family tree” an individual belongs to. However, no serious study claims to reveal a person’s ethnic or national identity. One rather obvious reason for this restriction is that the genetic mutations that structure the ancestral patterns revealed through genetic tests, are much older than even the most pretentious nationalists would claim their nations or ethnic groups to be. Even if an individual combines both ways of genetic genealogy (mitochondrial and Y-chromosomal DNA), this still reveals next to nothing about the ethnic identity of the vast majority of their ancestors: Combined mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosomal DNA contain information only about two direct lines of ancestors, since the mitochondrial DNA was passed on exclusively from mothers to their children, and the Y-chromosomal DNA was passed on only from fathers to sons. If one goes back only to the fifth generation, there are thirty-two ancestors in it, sixteen female and sixteen male. However, mitochondrial DNA was inherited only from one of these female ancestors and Y-chromosomal DNA only from one of the male ancestors, while all the other thirty individuals have equally contributed to the overall genome (Brodwin 2002: 328). Therefore, the belief that ethnicity can be determined by looking at a person’s genome presupposes that the person’s ancestors were, over centuries, strictly endogamous within an ethnic group. The two most influential theoreticians in late Soviet ethnicity theory, Yulian Bromley and Lev Gumilev both presupposed endogamy within ethnic groups, and saw ethnic mixing as a suspicious phenomenon of modernity (Bromley 1990: 21; Bassin 2016: 30-34).

Identity builders have been seduced by genetics because they offer the “cachet of science as the ultimate guarantor of truth” and they appear to be “more stable over time than more putatively accidental aspects of identity” (Brodwin 2002). Therefore, DNA as a concept has been used wrongly or confusingly not only on the local level to explain everything inexplicable so far, but also in the nation-wide discourse about the origin of Ukrainians and the origin of differences between Ukrainians and Russians.

A very telling example for the uninformed use of DNA as a determinant of ethnicity was a documentary aired in November 2012 on *Ukrayina*, a TV channel controlled by Ukraine’s richest Oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov. It was called *DNA Portrait of a Nation* and was announced days ahead as the “scientific sensation of the century.”<sup>18</sup> The filmmakers collected hundreds of DNA samples from Ukrainian celebrities and people with allegedly ancient Ukrainian family names (which, in the Slavic tradition, are inherited from the father and thereby, just like the Y-chromosome, carry information about only one line of male ancestors). The documentary claimed, without explanation, that “like most other ethnicities, Ukrainian ethnicity is passed on by the father to his children”. Therefore, when choosing candidates with ancient Ukrainian family ties, the male lineage was decisive. The collected specimens were analyzed by “the best geneticists in the world”. Based on this analysis the documentary did away with the “Soviet propaganda” that all three Eastern Slavic nations, Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, had their roots in mediaeval Kievan Rus. Instead, the documentary claimed that Ukrainians were not Slavs at all. Rather, the film asserted, they were the most ancient branch of Arians, a people which, according to the film, originated from Ukraine and spread from there to other parts of Eurasia. The documentary also included reenacted scenes from a bronze-age Ukraine. These depicted the dramatic encounters of the different peoples which allegedly teamed up to form the modern Ukrainian people. The film neither stated that there was no country called Ukraine in the bronze-age, nor that the people living in its territory would not call themselves Ukrainians for another five thousand years.

A talk-show that followed the airing of the film<sup>19</sup> was accompanied by screened charts, statistics, and maps meant to reinforce the claim of scientific validity that pervaded the entire broadcast. The broadcast's content and conclusions may not have been assumed to be factual by most of the audience. However, the spirit, in which genetics and ethnicity are discussed, clearly reinforces the idea that ethnicity is a category of natural science that can be determined using genetic analysis. The ease with which lay people, politicians, and journalists talk about genetics in present day Ukraine points to an observation made by Brodwin (Brodwin 2002: 326) that references to genetics can be used freely to prove or disprove old wisdoms about one's own ethnic identity and the identities of others. The very complexity of genetics is an invitation for ethnic entrepreneurs to pick the proof they need to support their own narrative and to undermine the narratives of others. In Soviet times, ethnic categories were seen as part of an objective realm, recognizable for everyone with a sober mind. After the turmoil of post-Soviet renegotiation of identities, genetics may seem a welcome way to restore a lost sense of objectivity.

### **Why these five realms?**

The five markers of ethnic boundaries as they appear in the narratives of informants in southern Bessarabia; language, religion, shared historical experience, folklore, and genes, were all endowed with elaborate folk theories, how they can be detected, how they act out, how they can be acquired and reproduced, and finally, how ethnic boundaries can be maintained with a separate technique for each ethnic marker (see table below). Why is it these five markers that came to serve as the source of which narratives of ethnic distinctions are made? They all have in common that they are perceived to be essential qualities of every person. They retain their influence on a person's character regardless of individual choices. They are engraved in an essential and unchangeable core of a person's identity. If a person adopts a new language, a new religion, or a new way of life, this according to the narratives analyzed here, it would not change their inner dispositions. This is demonstrated by the following table that puts the folk theories about how each of the five aspects discussed here shape a person's essential qualities into the context of how such qualities are ostensibly acquired, transmitted and maintained.

	<b>function</b>	<b>manifestation</b>	<b>mechanism of enclosing ethnic essence</b>	<b>mode of acquisition</b>	<b>mode of reproduction</b>	<b>mode of maintenance</b>
<b>language</b>	communication, identification	speech, especially when uncontrolled	The matter of thought is language; thought is the basis of behavior.	from linguistic environment during childhood	teaching, insisting on one language	linguistic purism
<b>religion</b>	spiritual, social	observance	Religion informs values, values inform behavior.	conversion, initiation	mission	church politics

<b>shared his- torical expe- rience</b>	intergenera- tional connec- tion	practices of com- memoration	Values derived from a common experience inform behavior	learned from specialists, media, and lay	commemorative culture	regulating com- memorative cul- ture
<b>folklore</b>	recreation, identification	performance	Values engraved in song, dance, and tale inform be- havior.	learned from cultural in- siders	popularization	ethnic labeling of folkloric per- formances
<b>genes</b>	biological	phenotype	Genes shape char- acter.	inherited from parents	sexual	endogamy within the ethnic group

The one technique of ethnic boundary maintenance that reappears in all the narratives mentioned above is a mechanism of exclusion. If competing narratives contradict each other, one of them needs to be disavowed. The most common way of doing this is to exclude those who disseminate a conflicting narrative from the circle of people who are competent to tell narratives about a certain group. People who are portrayed as having forfeited their membership in a certain group, because of the way they live or the values they hold, can easily be denied the competence of seeing, detecting, or sensing *true* members of a group and the boundary to those who are not.

This form of exclusion entails a claim to possess better techniques of detecting ethnic essence than people with competing narratives. If new techniques appear, such as when genetics entered the field, it is crucial to realign these with existing narratives. Complex academic paradigms like genetics, linguistics, or history offer sufficient dubiety to make them essentially self-service stores of narratives for those with the power to exclude competing narratives.

But dubiety is not the only reason why it is language, religion, commemorative culture, folklore, and genetics that define the boundaries of ethnic groups. They all have another important characteristic in common; they are systems of signs and rules. All five realms consist of a finite list of signs, which can be combined according to a limited set of rules. If the signs can be found on a particular list (i.e the lexicon of a language) and are combined according to a particular set of rules (i.e the grammar of the respective language), then new meanings can be coined in theoretically infinite quantity. This characteristic is of course most manifest in language, for which Wilhelm von Humboldt (von Humboldt 1963 [1820]: 3) has observed, that it makes infinite use of finite media. Language can combine a limited number of signs into an unlimited number of meaningful utterances. But in genetics too, sequences of DNA, composed of a limited set of molecules, express themselves in the phenotypes of organisms with theoretically unlimited variability. In religion, commemorative culture, and folklore, the elements for combination are much more limited in number and the rules by which they can be combined are more malleable. Nevertheless, the symbols of religious ceremony, folklore, and commemorative culture cannot be combined randomly. Imagine a chorus reserved for Easter sung at Christmas, a dance reserved for a wedding performed during fasting, the affectionate title awarded to a war hero expanded to his adversaries. All these breaches might be more negotiable than an ungrammatical sentence, but to those who use them for marking ethnic boundaries, such breaches reveal an outsider, someone not gifted with a sense for the subtleties of a cultural code as one feels the subtleties of one's native language.

The insistence on purity of a sign-rule system is therefore fiercest in those systems where the rules are most rigid: in the case of language (where it comes in the form of linguistic purism) and in the discourse about genes (where it comes as the claim that ethnic groups are normally endogenous). All five realms are what Stephen Pinker calls “discreet combinatorial systems”. They are very distinct from most other complicated systems such as weather, geology, or sound, which all *blend* the elements they are made of. As Pinker observes: “In a blending system, the properties of the combination lie *between* the properties of its elements, and the properties are lost in the average of the mixture.” Such as when red and white paint are mixed, pink paint emerges, whereas red and white are lost (Pinker 1995: 85). Blending languages, however, does not reduce the number of possible utterances. It may indeed raise this number significantly by adding newly coined words to the vocabulary already existing. Blending the genetic stock of two ethnic groups does not reduce the number of possible phenotypes; it might even enhance them. Blending folkloric tunes or ornaments with those of a neighboring group might create a new style, coexisting with established ones. Therefore, mixing the elements of these systems alone would not result in loss of variety, as in a blending system. The damage such mixture does is in the rulebook rather than in the stock of signs. Those who despise mixing fear for the established *rules of combination*. Breaching these rules poses a significant challenge to the claim that these rules are essential and intuitively detectable by those who possess the ethnic essence (and by no one else). The real loss that occurs through blending is in the capacity to exclude people because they do not fit the molds of the well-established and allegedly natural groups.

The Soviet Union’s system of administration crucially hinged on the capacity to exclude people on the grounds of their ethnicity, social class, or political affiliation. Ethnicity especially fell into the realm of categories, the objectivity of which was critical in holding up the existing political order. Although this order eventually disintegrated, its legacy of ascribing categories to people and claiming authority over the demarcation of these categories proved invaluable for the nationalisms of the emerging post-Soviet political order. Therefore, the narratives and techniques described for the case of southern Bessarabia are a profoundly post-Soviet phenomenon.

## **Acknowledgements**

Research for this paper has been generously funded by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Saale), Germany.

## **References**

- Anikin, Nikita Vladimirovich. 2009. “K Voprosu o Sovremennom Samosoznanii Gagauzov Moldavii.” *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 4, 17–25.
- Arutyunyan, Yurik Vartanovich. 1974. “Experience of a Socio-Ethnic Survey (Relating to the Tatar ASSR).” In *Soviet Ethnology and Anthropology Today*, edited by Yulian Vladimirovich Bromley. The Hague: Mouton.
- Barth, Fredrik. 2000. “Enduring and Emerging Issues in the Analysis of Ethnicity.” In *The Anthropology of Ethnicity - Beyond Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, edited by Han Vermeulen and Cora Govers. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

- Bassin, Mark. 2016. *The Gumilev Mystique – Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Bernsand, Niklas. 2006. "Othering Surzhyk in Implicit Metalinguistic Discourse." In *History, Language and Society in the Borderlands of Europe*, edited by Barbara Törnquist - Plewa. Malmö: Sekel.
- Bilaniuk, Laada. 2005. *Contested Tongues - Language Politics and Cultural Correction in Ukraine*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Brandes, Detlef, Holm Sundhaussen, and Stefan Troebst, eds. 2010. *Lexikon Der Vertreibungen. Deportation, Zwangsaussiedlung Und Ethnische Säuberung Im Europa Des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau.
- Brodwin, Paul. 2002. "Genetics, Identity, and the Anthropology of Essentialism." *Anthropological Quarterly* 75 (2): 323–30.
- Bromley, Yulian Vladimirovich. 1980. "The Object and the Subject-Matter of Ethnography." In *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, edited by Ernest Gellner. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bromley, Yulian Vladimirovich, and Roman Grigor'evich Podol'niy. 1990. *Chelovechestvo Eto Narody*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Mysl'.
- Cash, Jennifer R. 2011. *Villages on Stage - Folklore and Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova*. Münster: Lit.
- Connor, Walker. 2011. "Beyond Reason—The Nature of the Ethnonational Bond." In *Multiculturalism*, edited by Gerd Baumann and Steven Vertovec. London: Routledge.
- Derzhavin, Nikolay Sevast'yanovich. 1914. *Bolgarskiya Kolonyi v Rossii (Tavrisheskaya, Kher-sonskaya, i Bessarabskaya Gubernii)*. Sofia: Derzhavna pechatnitsa. <http://libinfo.org/index.php?file=ukr534.djvu&down=ukr534.djvu>.
- Figes, Orlando. 2002. *Nataschas Tanz - Eine Kulturgeschichte Russlands*. Berlin: Berlin Verlag.
- Flier, Michael. 1998. "Surzhyk: The Rules of Engagement." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 22, 113–36.
- Gelman, Susan A., and Henry M. Wellman. 1991. "Insides and Essences: Early Understanding of the Non-Obvious." *Cognition* 38 (1991): 213–44.
- Habeck, Joachim Otto. 2011. "Thank You for Being' Neighborhood, Ethno-Culture, and Social Recognition in the House of Culture." In *Reconstructing the House of Culture-Community, Self, and the Makings of Culture in Russia and Beyond*, edited by Brian Donahoe and Joachim Otto Habeck. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.

- Hilton, James L., and William von Hippel. 1996. "Stereotypes." *Annual Review of Psychology*, no. 47: 237–71.
- Humboldt, Wilhelm von. 1963. "Ueber Das Vergleichende Sprachstudium in Beziehung Auf Die Verschiedenen Epochen Der Sprachentwicklung." In *Werke in Fünf Bänden, Band III Schriften Zur Sprachphilosophie*. Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung.
- Kisse, Anton Ivanovich. 2006. *Vozrozhdenie Bolgar Ukrainy*. Odessa: Optimum.
- Kushko, Andrey, and Viktor Taki. 2012. *Bessarabiya v Sostave Rossiyskoy Imperii (1812-1917)*. Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie.
- Kushner, Pavel Ivanovich. 1951. *Etnicheskie Territorii i Etnicheskie Granitsy*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.
- Lavender, Abraham D. 2006. "Y-StrDNA." Edited by James H. Brix. *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications.
- McWhorter, John H. 2014. *The Language Hoax: Why the World Looks the Same in Any Language*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Moshkov, Valentin Aleksandrovich. 1901. "Gagauzy Benderskago Uezda. VI Semeynyya i Obshchestvennyya Otnosheniya u Gagauzov. VII Otnosheniya Gagauzov k Drugim Narodnostyam." *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* 1901 (2): 1–49.
- Pinker, Steven. 1995. *The Language Instinct*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Renan, Ernest. 1994. "Qu'est-Ce Qu'une Nation?" In *Nationalism*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 17–18. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Richardson, Tanya. 2004. "Disciplining the Past in Post-Soviet Ukraine - Memory and History in Schools and Families." In *Memory, Politics and Religion*, edited by Frances Pine, Deema Kaneff, and Haldis Haukanes. Münster: Lit.
- Serbens'ka, Oleksandra Antonivna, and Z. M Terlak. 1999. *Ukrainskiy Yazyk Dlya Nachinayushchikh*. L'viv: Svit.
- Somers, Margaret H. 1994. "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach." *Theory and Society* 23 (5): 605–49.
- Stalin, Joseph. 1994. "The Nation." In *Nationalism*, edited by John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 18–21. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tishkov, Valery Aleksandrovich. 1997. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union - The Mind Aflame*. London: Sage Publications.



- Troebst, Stefan. 2006. "Postkommunistische Erinnerungskulturen Im Östlichen Europa. Bestandsaufnahme, Kategorisierung, Periodisierung." In *Kulturstudien Ostmitteleuropas - Aufsätze Und Essays*, edited by Stefan Troebst. Frankfurt a.M: Peter Lang.
- Whorf, Benjamin Lee. 1956. "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to Language." In *Language, Thought and Reality - Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, edited by John B. Carroll. Cambridge MA: The M.I.T. Press.
- Willermet, Cathy. 2006. "Eve, Mitochondrial." Edited by James H. Brix. *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications.
- Wilson, Andrew. 2002. *The Ukrainians - Unexpected Nation*. New Haven: Yale Nota Bene.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> The Russian Empire ruled Bessarabia from 1812 to 1856. From 1856 to 1878, Bessarabia's southern tip belonged to the United Principalities, a forerunner-state of Romania and at the time still formally a vassal of the Ottoman Empire. From 1878 until 1918 the entire province of Bessarabia belonged to the Russian Empire again. After World War I it became Part of Romania until the Soviet Union annexed Bessarabia in summer 1940, following a Soviet ultimatum. Between 1941 and August 1944, Bessarabia was occupied by a Romanian and German coalition. From 1944 to 1991, it belonged to the Soviet Union; the southern outreaches of Bessarabia became part of the Ukrainian SSR and the bulk of the former province's territory formed the Moldovan SSR.

<sup>2</sup> The Ukrainian census of 2001 informs about the ethnic composition of the region as well as the use and proficiency of languages: <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/nationality/odesa/> (18.12.2017)

<sup>3</sup> The term used in Bessarabia by my informants was not the official *trudarmiya* ("labor army"), but *trudovoy front* ("labor front").

<sup>4</sup> Serbens'ka made a name for herself as an ardent language purist. She wrote *Antisurzhyk* (1994), a book opposing the common practice of mixing Russian and Ukrainian into Surzhyk (see Flier 1998, 114).

<sup>5</sup> Interview in Izmail, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012

<sup>6</sup> Interview in Kubey, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013. At this time the village was still known by its Soviet name Chervonoarmeyskoe.

<sup>7</sup> *Uezdnyi Telegraf*, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Za veru, Ukrainu i kazachestvo

<sup>8</sup> *Kur'er Nedeli*, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012, O kazakakh vchera i segodnya

---

<sup>9</sup> “A nation is a historical[ly] constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (Stalin, 1994: 20).

<sup>10</sup> “Ethnos in the general sense of the word may be defined as a historically formed aggregate of people who share relatively stable, specific features of culture (including language) and psychology, an awareness of their unity and their difference from other similar groups, and an Ethnonym which they have given themselves” (Bromley, 1980: 154).

<sup>11</sup> Interview in Izmail, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013

<sup>12</sup> Interview in Izmail, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013

<sup>13</sup> Interview in Kubey, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013

<sup>14</sup> Interview the director of the Izmail Center of Ethnic Cultures, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013

<sup>15</sup> A song best known in its Ukrainian version, *ti zh mene pidmanula*, was sung in Albanian by a group of elderly women in the predominantly Albanian-speaking village of Zhovtnevoe (the village’s pre-Soviet Name, Karakurt, was reinstalled in 2016), Bolgrad Rayon, June 2013.

<sup>16</sup> There are two widely accepted procedures to trace ancestry through many generations and to reveal common ancestors of large groups of people that lived many generations ago. For individuals of both sexes, the maternal line can be traced using mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA), which is inherited from the mother and is much shorter and therefore easier to analyze than nuclear DNA (Willermet, 2006: 876-878). For men, there is also the possibility to trace the paternal line along the DNA in the Y-chromosome, which is passed on from fathers to sons (Lavender, 2006: 2355-2356). The DNA in all other chromosomes is inherited in a random mix of equal proportions from mother and father. Therefore, it is virtually impossible to trace one lineage. But mtDNA and Y-chromosomal DNA can be traced back along patterns of mutations for many thousands of years. As a result, statistics and maps can be produced that illustrate the pattern of human settlement on the planet. Coupled with archeological findings and linguistic research, these insights can reveal hitherto unknown pages of the human story.

<sup>17</sup> See the Genographic Project homepage: <https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/about/>, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<sup>18</sup> The documentary is available in *Ukrayina*’s web archive: <http://kanalukraina.tv/ru/programs/p/396#episode/>, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<sup>19</sup> The talk-show is available at *Ukrayina*’s web archive: <http://kanalukraina.tv/ru/programs/p/396#episode/>, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017