Introduction

Speaking about Kharkiv, local residents sometimes say "This city is not the first, but neither is it the second." The point of the expression is that if, allegedly, we are not in first place, we do not want to settle for second. Such ambitions on the part of a city that was once the administrative capital of Soviet Ukraine are quite understandable. Kharkiv made an impetuous career in a relatively brief historical period. Having appeared on the steppe frontier of the Muscovite state in the mid-seventeenth century as a small wooden fort, over time it developed into the capital of a region known as Sloboda Ukraine, becoming the second university center after Lviv on Ukrainian territory. Kharkiv entered the modern period of its history as one of the largest cities of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, second only to Kyiv as an educational, industrial, and arms-production center of Ukraine.

Historically, Kharkiv belongs to two categories at once: "second" cities and border (margin-centric) cities.[1] I consider it comparable to cities like Lviv, Gdansk, Milan, or Barcelona. Geographically, Kharkiv is the most important Ukrainian urban center in the vicinity of the current Ukrainian-Russian border, which runs forty kilometers north of the city.[2] Politically, Kharkiv was at times a rival to Kyiv. From the national perspective, its public space has long been a contested ground between Ukrainian and Russian discourses of identity. No wonder Kharkiv has been rendered differently in their respective national narratives.

The Ukrainian image of Kharkiv has had several close associations: with the Cossacks; the philosopher and moralist Hryhorii Skovoroda; Kharkiv University; the national renaissance of the early nineteenth century; and Ukrainian national communism of the 1920s. In the Russian narrative, Kharkiv has often been presented as a transitional point in Russia's triumphant advance toward the Black Sea, an exemplary center of imperial education and science, as well as an industrial, commercial, and transportation center. Images of Kharkiv took shape and changed constantly, depending on the position of the observer, the various meanings attributed to one and the same phenomenon, and, of course, shifts in the city's political and cultural environments.

This book is about Kharkiv and its region, considered here as social constructs and, at the same time, as a space in which competing and even mutually exclusive

discourses of identity arose, met, and interacted.[3] Presented here is the history of the "imagination" of Kharkiv and its region, known as Sloboda Ukraine. It is the history of their mental (re)mapping and representation in national narratives, as well as in the public space of the city and region from their first appearance on the map in the mid-seventeenth century to the present day. Kharkiv's "cityscape" is a reflection of different discourses of identity elaborated and implemented by different political regimes—Ukrainian, imperial Russian, and Soviet—at different times.

Today the concept of identity has become all but the basic and indispensable topos of the social sciences and humanities. Regardless of certain doubts about the utility of this concept in research work, the category of identity, which is indissolubly associated with history, takes on particular significance with regard to Ukrainian themes. Like the rings of a tree trunk, contemporary Ukrainian society retains various discourses of identity that have arisen in the course of its history. Almost all of them have acquired not only a national dimension but imperial, regional, and local dimensions as well.

In this book, the concept of national identity is based on its interpretation by those historians who go beyond the era of the French Revolution in search of the roots of modern nationalism.[4] I proceed from the concept of modern and premodern types of national identity that coexisted in parallel or were arranged in a certain hierarchy of compatible complex or hybrid structures on the broad historical expanse of the Ukrainian-Russian cultural borderland. The point is that concepts of nationalism worked out in the Western world were not and could not have been transferred to the historical territory of Orthodox Slavic Rus' without substantial revisions and limitations.

In the Russian language, the term *natsiia* (nation) has not gained acceptance as a self-description of the country and continues to amass negative connotations in Russian society to the present day; *natsiia* has been supplanted by the word *narod* (literally, "people"), a borrowing from Polish (*naród*), in which it appeared as an analogue of "nation."[5] Translated into Russian, however, the term took on an ambiguity that it still retains today: *narod* appears in three hypostases at once—social, religious, and ethnocultural. That ambiguity is the result of retarded intellectual and cultural development as well as shallow modernization in the Slavic Orthodox world: neither the Westernized Russian nobility along with the intelligentsia nor the Marxists, nourished by Western ideas, managed to overcome the premodern syncretism of that world.

In this book, I proceed from the premise that until the mid-nineteenth century at least, no intellectuals of Russian, Ukrainian, or Belarusian origin ventured in their searches for modern national identity beyond the mental bounds of early modern "Holy Rus'," in which Great Russians, Little Russians, and White Russians were presented as "unassimilated and indivisible." The situation began to change only with the appearance of modern Ukrainian nationalism, but in the course of

the last century or so, primordial religious and imperial structures have remained astonishingly persistent in this part of the world.

In the past, regional and local features were accepted as primordially equivalent to national ones. The problem of the relation between national and regional identities takes on particular significance in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine.[6] The history of Kharkiv is inseparable from that of the Sloboda Ukraine historical region.[7] The latter took shape between the mid-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries on the steppe frontier, control over which was contested by Russia, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Crimean Khanate and its vassals, and three Cossack military-democratic polities—the Hetmanate, the Zaporozhian Sich, and the Don Cossack Host. Those lands are now divided between the Kursk, Voronezh, and Belgorod oblasts (provinces) of Russia and the Luhansk, Donetsk, Poltava, Sumy, and Kharkiv oblasts of Ukraine. It must be added that the borders of the region coincided only in part with the administrative boundaries of the Kharkiv (Sloboda Ukraine) gubernia (vicegerency) in the Russian Empire and the Kharkiv oblast in the USSR and present-day Ukraine.

As a rule, historical regions have no definite borders with adjacent regions: throughout their existence, they usually play the role of specific contact zones of intensive cultural exchange.[8] The particular features of one historical region or another can therefore be defined and understood only in comparative perspective, taking account of the whole gamut of its cultural, economic, political, and sociolegal characteristics. For all the ambiguity and indeterminacy of definitions of historical regions, the use of such definitions assumes a certain territorial integrity endowed with a particular historical continuity, institutions, and symbolism reflected in regional identity.[9]

As a rule, direct links between identity and region are sustained by regional narratives that produce images of nature and landscape; by architecture, ethnocultural descriptions, evaluations of the state of the economy and relations between province and center, stereotypical images of the population (both "us" and "them"), historical texts, and so on. Regional identities are manifested not only in narratives but also in social constructions and practices, rituals and discourses bounded by particular times and places and competing with one another. In the final analysis, regional narratives enter into direct dialogue with national narratives.[10]

With the cultural turn in the humanities, regional history began to be constructed on the model of the imagination of the nation, and the very appearance of the region was interpreted as the result of intellectual projection onto the map— that is to say, mental mapping. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the phenomenon of Ukrainian regionalism was regarded initially and primarily in the current political context.[11] In turn, the regionalization of Ukrainian political and cultural space fostered growing attention to regional aspects of Ukrainian history as a whole and to individual regions in particular. Historical regions of southern

and eastern Ukraine, including the present-day Kharkiv oblast, have come increasingly into the scholarly field of vision.[12]

The Sloboda Ukraine region, of which Kharkiv became the center in the eighteenth century, has taken on different meanings at various times. It has been variously positioned on mental maps of Ukrainian, Russian, and Soviet symbolic space. In some cases it was the steppe marchland of the Muscovite state, in others a pale shadow of the Cossack Hetmanate, but most often it held the status of a borderland between forest and steppe, between the world of nomads and settled peoples, Slavs and Turkic tribes, Cossack regions and empire, Ukraine and Russia. It has encompassed the steppe frontier—the moving boundary of military settlements—or the whole gamut of multifarious divisions between Ukrainian and Russian settlements located in proximity to one another throughout the expanse of the borderland.

Although the concept of borderland is still in the process of theoretical development, it is already gaining recognition as one of the most substantial elements of nation-state building.[13] It is another question whether the borderland has been apprehended as a zone of division or contact and, if so, whether it has participated in its own right in the construction of national identities. What symbolic space has it occupied in national narratives? Has it produced a new identity space in its own right, or has it remained a mosaic, an eclectic mixture of external characteristics and attributes?

Historically, Sloboda Ukraine has been part of the Ukrainian-Russian borderland, which is the most problematic of the borderlands defining present-day Ukrainian political and national space.[14] The Ukrainian-Russian borderland is best described as a transitional or contact cultural zone, whether or not it is traversed by political or administrative boundaries. In every concrete historical instance, the Ukrainian-Russian borderland was not stable or precisely defined. It appears most often as a mental construct with a symbolic character, as well as in the form of corresponding processes, practices, and discourses arising from Ukrainian-Russian relations and endowed with their own array of symbols. The delimitation of the Ukrainian-Russian border is a problem not only and not so much of political geography or bilateral relations between states. It is, rather, a problem of national (re)identification.[15] Speaking generally, it is a problem touching on fundamental questions: what Russia is and what Ukraine is; what their mutual relations have been, are now, and might be in the future.[16]

The basic role in the formation and evolution of collective discourses of identity is played by cities and the urban cultural milieu. For that reason, the author of these pages has found it necessary to go beyond the bounds of discursive analysis and deal with particular aspects of social reality when it comes to describing such matters as the city's demography; reciprocal relations between the center and the region; the national and cultural policies of the center; the local authorities' and civil society's response to them or to the development of the Ukrainian national

movement. The present book relies primarily on published sources, mainly narratives. The overwhelming majority of works devoted to the history of the city and its region belong to the genre of local history. In this regard, I was able to rely on some of my own research pertaining to the history of Sloboda Ukraine, Kharkiv, and Kharkiv University.[17]

The structure of this work is based on the chronological principle. Chapter 1 traces the history of the mental mapping and institutionalization of the Sloboda Ukraine steppe frontier to the second half of the eighteenth century, including the Catherinian reforms. Chapter 2 concerns the founding of Kharkiv University, which reflected the complexity of relations between the imperial center and the province and influenced the symbolic and cultural geography of the region in the Russian Empire. Chapter 3 is devoted to the process of reidentification of the region under the influence of imperial modernization and modern national ideas during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Chapter 4, which encompasses the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, examines the urban development of Kharkiv, the changes taking place in its sociocultural space, and the progress of the Ukrainian national movement in the city. Chapter 5 deals with the history of Kharkiv from 1917 to 1991: I examine the struggle for the city in the years 1917–20, the development of Kharkiv as the capital of Soviet Ukraine, and, finally, its progress as the "second city" in the postwar period. Chapter 6 examines the reidentification of Kharkiv and region in the new political and cultural environment after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the contradictory politics of identity as reflected in the city's public space. Chapter 7 is an attempt to trace the political and symbolic struggle for Kharkiv from 2010, when President Viktor Yanukovych's regime paved the way for the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian "hybrid war," which began in 2014, up to 2019, when the current president, Volodymyr Zelensky, came to power.

I am far from thinking that I have managed to solve all the problems touched upon in this work. Nevertheless, I shall consider my task accomplished if I manage to show the reader that Kharkiv and region, first, have their own specific places in Ukrainian historical space and time, and, second, that the project of Ukrainian nation-state building cannot be fulfilled without successful integration of the Russified border regions into the new grand narrative. This task has yet to be carried out.

Notes

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5. Aleksei Miller, "'Narodnost' i 'natsiia' v russkom iazyke XIX veka: Podgotovitel'nye nabroski k istorii poniatii," *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 1 (2009): 151–65; Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008).

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