The Effect of Russian Colonialism on Ukrainian Cultural Identity

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Abstract

Ukraine is currently engaged with Russia in an all-out war. Due to this aggression, our research set out to determine if Russian colonialism has impacted Ukraine's cultural identity, given how Russia has been involved with Ukraine for over a century. The research investigated whether Russian colonialist practices affected Ukraine's cultural identity by examining Russian-based propaganda, corrupt policies and institutions, and food. Based on a literature review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with student respondents. Analysis of the responses demonstrated that Russian colonialist practices affected Ukraine in both negative and positive ways. The results indicate that Russian colonialist practices have impacted Ukrainian cultural identity. Further research is needed to identify other factors that affect Ukrainian cultural identity.

Introduction

As globalization and multiculturalism continue to expand in the contemporary era, social inequality has become a heavily discussed and researched phenomenon. Social inequality is defined as unequal opportunities, rewards, and individual privileges and how those differences affect the future outcomes of individuals and larger societies (Binelli et al., 2015. pg 246). In addition, social inequality is also understood by looking at different social locations and areas and dominant social groups taking advantage of those less fortunate (Palmer, 2022). As social inequality continues to expand worldwide, it is essential to examine the different factors that can influence it and how that influence affects society. It is crucial to recognize that social inequality can affect how individuals and even entire countries meet worldwide achievements (Binelli et al., 2015. pg 246). Social inequality can impact a country's development in areas related to political stability and economic performance (Binelli et al., 2015. pg 246).

One of the ways that social inequality is perpetuated is through colonization, which creates lasting systems of oppression. Colonization is a process used to settle and control land not belonging to those attempting to colonize. Some ways that colonization is effective are through resource extraction, narrative control in the writing and rewriting of histories, land allocation or retransformation of boundaries, the genocide of people, and the removal of cultural identity (Durand, 2022).

By exploring what can shape and form a cultural identity, we can better understand how cultural identity contributes to social inequality. An apt description of cultural identity is provided to us by Isaiah Berlin (Gilbert, 2010, p.66).

> To belong to a given community, to be connected with its members by indissoluble and impalpable ties of everyday language, historical memory, habit, tradition, and feeling, is a basic human need no less

natural than that for food or
drink or security or
procreation.

By closely examining corruption, food, and propaganda in Ukraine, we can better understand how these three phenomena have impacted its cultural identity and how that continues to influence its society.

Corruption is an abuse of power to further the abuser's agenda. It can be seen in many different levels and aspects of society, from bribes for better grades to vacations for public policy influence. Corruption, therefore, impacts cultural identity as it transforms policies that affect the citizens of a nation. In order to examine corruption on the world stage, many different components are examined and ranked, such as the diversion of public funds, excessive red tape in the public sector (which may increase opportunities for corruption), and access to information on public affairs and government activities (Transparency International, 2021). All these factors, and more, influence the ranking of countries on the world corruption index; this can have lasting economic impacts.

The ways in which food and cultural identity are linked are vast, similar, and quite different. Food can resist and influence cultural identity. Food intertwines with a culture; some meals or ingredients are specific identifiers of nationalities or cultures. Some examples of identity and food interconnectedness are pasta and Italy, crawfish boil and Creole culture, or borscht and Ukraine. Food, therefore, is a significant part of a person's culture and identity and can actively change who and what they are.

Propaganda is a system used to influence public opinion, and propaganda works through the dissemination of information. Methods used include the control of the narrative around a particular set of information, how that information is dispersed, and how much of that information is provided. Since propaganda manipulates and controls information, this leads to a change in identity. By throwing out false narratives on a massive scale, the meaning of one's culture and identity will shift and change.

Given the unique situation in which Ukraine finds itself, it is worth researching how cultural identity influences a society constantly under attack by an aggressive and unrelenting neighbour, Russia.

Corruption, for instance, stems from several cultural characteristics, such as individuality and egocentrism. Without these cultural traits, Russian corruption would not exist in its current form, be so prevalent, and be used against Ukraine to impact their culture. Food also influences cultural identity. Not only can food be used to suppress and destroy cultural identity through narrative control, but it can also be used to reclaim a history once lost. Without using food to express cultural identity, Ukraine would be limited in separating its culture from its Russian neighbours, thus becoming an extension of it.

Lastly, propaganda can shape cultural identity and cast doubt on its legitimacy. Russia has led a mass propaganda campaign against Ukraine, creating doubt about the cultural identity of Ukraine on the international and native levels. The propaganda is an outcome of Russian cultural characteristics and values, and as a result, it continues not to affect Ukrainian identity but the perception of Ukraine in the world.

This paper examines how corruption, food perception, and propaganda from Russian colonialist practices influence the cultural identity of Ukrainians. This is done to determine how the cultural identity of Ukrainians has been impacted by the current full-scale invasion by Russia, which began with the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Literature Review

Cultural Identity

To understand what constitutes a cultural identity, one must first examine what culture is. Culture as a singular definition is contested; what is agreed upon is the fluidity of culture and that it is multifaceted in the ways it can be explored (Jones et al., 2018). There are visible aspects of culture that are easily identifiable. Some examples are clothing, hairstyles, language, and meal choices or preparation. Other elements of culture are invisible and influence a person's worldview. Examples include belief systems, morality, history, behaviours, and communication styles or strategies. Culture is a system of identification that allows individuals access to different social groups, as well as identify their position within society.

The fluidity of culture further exemplifies the difficulty in creating a singular linear definition. Cultural identity

is not fixed or singular; it is a fluid component of who an individual is. Snyder (2012) identifies how identity can be understood, whether it is a monovalent recognition, singular content, or multivalent recognition, a diverse way of being. Hall (1994) identifies two ways of thinking about cultural identity specifically. The first is through the shared common history of a group; this history is identified through experiences and cultural codes or norms. By exploring the common shared history of a group, such as defining experiences, cultural traditions, and food, a person can rediscover and redefine themselves. By exploring and researching a common shared history, long-neglected experiences can be rediscovered and renewed in the modern age. The second way of thinking about cultural identity, according to Hall (1994), is to look at the past, present, and future. It is a way of looking at what has been, what it has evolved into, and what we are becoming. This form of cultural identity 'belongs to the future as well as the past.'

Cultural identity is also something that can be reclaimed. An example of reclamation can be seen in the indigenous people in Canada reclaiming their history and media through mediums like film and television. Shows created by Inuit peoples in Canada to reclaim control of histories, knowledge, traditions and revitalization of their lingual heritage (Meadows, 1994). The reclamation of cultural identity can also be much more extensive, even at the national level. As Gilbert (2010, p. 69) explains, cultural identity is utilized by nationalists as a way of promoting their ideologies. They capitalize on the singular cultural features that best suit their needs, such as language or religion (Gilbert, 2010, p.69). Many factors can affect cultural identity, including the way that culture is perceived and what is associated with that culture and its identity.

Propaganda

Propaganda is a power structure. Media plays an active role in disseminating propaganda, demonstrating how propaganda and information within the media are demonstrated in the propaganda model (Herman, 2018). This model shows how prevalent and effective propaganda can be to a populace; it was created to understand how certain world events were narrated and how that information was reproduced to the general populace. It does this by closely examining the five

filters at play when mass media disseminates information, which are ownership, advertising, sources, flak (a way of representing those that disagree), and fear (anti-communism during the Cold War or islamophobia post 9/11) (Herman, 2018).

Who owns the media that is providing the information? For example, Mark Zuckerberg owns Meta and controls Facebook, Instagram, Threads, Whatsapp, etc. This means that information posted to these sites is subject to the Meta guidelines and regulations. Advertising is the income source for media; even 'opting out' of advertising is a paid service. Its portrayal in advertising furthers propaganda messages, and an example is the 'exotic' representation of indigenous people in Australia and New Zealand by the tourism industry (Maydell, 2020). Sources are about how the information was obtained, who interpreted and whether it has been verified. Verification has become quite important in the digital age, with news outlets like the BBC adding public information verification to their online news site (BBC Verify). Flak is how the media portray opposition. That opposition is the opposition to the narrative, information, etc., that does not support the dominant narrative supported by the media. The final filter is fear,

> I think when we talked about the 'fifth filter' we should have brought in … the way artificial fears are created with a dual purpose... partly to get rid of people you don't like but partly to frighten the rest. Because if people are frightened, they will accept authority (Chomsky et al.; J., 2002).

These filters allow for examining and understanding how the media can influence popular perception, understanding of events, and changes in cultural identity. That power structure is utilized to influence cultural identities and values within a society and its perception on the world stage.

Russia has led a propaganda campaign against Ukraine to negatively influence the international community's perception of the Ukrainian state and internally disrupt liberal democratic ideologies. Russia utilizes all five filters from the propaganda model in its information dissemination to create fear and justify war. Russia has removed opposition or external media sources from the country. Those that are allowed in are heavily regulated

and monitored. The media that Russians can watch is state-sanctioned or owned, and the narrative they portray is pro-Russia. Additionally, Russia is attempting to influence people outside of Ukraine and within to question the cultural identity and background of Ukrainians. By spreading misinformation about Ukrainians being Nazis and terrorists, Russia can create doubt about Ukrainian cultural identity. The fear of NATO and anti-Russian aggression that Russia is propagating to Russian and Ukrainian civilians is part of the fifth filter in the propaganda model (Herman, 2018).

Meijas and Vokuev (2017) demonstrate how Russia has spread hateful and racist propaganda against Ukraine. Russia has used social media channels to promote anti-EU political agendas to undermine the freedom of the press. Also, by using social media, Russia has turned ordinary people into propaganda machines by having them spread hateful discourse for the whole world to see. By having misinformation on a massive scale, Ukrainian cultural identity is called into question. Other authors have also focused on how propaganda has been created through hate from cultural backgrounds. This includes doctoring or lying about the origin of photos, such as wounded children, and hiring fake witnesses to give false testimony, to cast doubt on a nation and its people (Mejias et al., N.E. 2017; Wang, 2005). This notion of other nations spreading hateful propaganda and misinformation is echoed by (Wang, 2005; Faulkner, 2006); they note how Americans who adopt children from China view them as less fortunate and do them a great honour by adopting them. This misinformation about these Chinese children and the great services done by American families is similar to Russia's narrative around adopting Ukrainian children taken during Russia's invasion (Rainsford, 2023).

The narrative of Ukraine being a "place that must be saved from themselves" is often found in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war since 2022. Such propaganda is actively used in the territories occupied by Russia to influence the Ukrainian population. Such actions are identified as "brainwashing," "zombification," and "targeted disinformation." Using these actions, cultural identity can be erased, instilling confusion within the population by replacing customs with targeted disinformation (Brandenberger, 2010; Svynarenko, 2023). Modern Russian imperial

propaganda harms Ukrainians today and challenges their cultural identity. Russian propaganda includes humiliating and banning Ukrainian customs and traditions.

In Russia's past, fear was crucial for building a paternalistic society (Cull et al., 2017). Using tools such as secret police, purges, ethnic cleansing, and famine, the Soviet Union created fear inside their society, which helped to keep people inside of this system. A totalitarian government must invent enemies or evil that must be fought. The model of paternalism helped Soviet authorities to create an illusion of a successful, happy, and safe life from the outside "enemies." This is relevant as Russia's past actions have continued to the 21st century. Ukrainian psychiatrist and human rights activist Semen Gluzman expressed that the 20th century was characterized by widespread fear, specifically fear of social concepts and scientific advancements that resulted in the loss of millions of lives (Plokhy, 2015). A person in the Soviet Union who disobeyed the rules and talked about Soviet ideology or propaganda risked being executed. In today's Russia, nothing much has changed. Therefore, most people live in fear, listen to what they are told, and follow the propaganda "rules." This naturally leads to an erosion of cultural identity (Comrade Kyiv, 2022).

Soviet mass media was used in anti-religious campaigns to aggressively spread atheism, as religion was a part of the traditional cultural identity of Ukrainians. Ukrainians were arrested and deported to Russia to lose their culture further. In Ukraine, in addition to the all-Union labels "Kurkul" and "counter-revolutionary," the terms "Ukrainian bourgeois nationalist," "Petlyurivite," and "Kurkul-Petlyuriv nests" were used. This language divided Russian society from Ukrainian, creating an "us" and "them" dichotomy. Dichotomies with this narrative make tools of colonialist practices such as the deprivation of rights, dehumanization, and other genocidal acts easier to perpetuate on a population.

The Russian Orthodox Church was installed in Ukraine as part of propaganda practices; its purpose is to popularize the ideas of the "Russian World". There are many different aspects of the informational influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia's war against Ukraine (Torichnyi et al., 2021). The first one is the

influence on the value and mental attitudes of the national identity of Ukrainians. The Russian Orthodox Church often uses its influence to promote a particular national identity narrative among Ukrainians. Emphasizing the historical, cultural and religious ties between Russia and Ukraine, the church tries to strengthen the sense of shared identity and minimize the differences between the two nations. In addition, they have legitimized Russia's war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea as a "peacekeeping mission" to support the right to reunify Orthodox "fraternal" people. The Russian Orthodox Church provides a religious interpretation of the conflict, recognizing Russia's actions as morally justified or divinely ordained. Referring to religious principles and historical narratives, the church seeks to create a perception that the war is a righteous struggle that protects Orthodox values or the interests of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine (Torichnyi et al., 2021). Of course, this throws Ukrainian cultural identity into question.

Russian colonization propaganda strategies have created systems where even top clergy in the church promote pro-Russian ideologies (Bachega, 2023). The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been accused of actively spreading pro-Russian Ukrainophobia ideas and providing direct ideological support for separatism (Al Jazeera, 2023). This is a small example of how Russian propaganda attempts to corrupt Ukrainian cultural identity and claims it as its own.

Corruption

Corruption in Ukraine results from colonialist systems implemented by the Soviet Union and enforced by modern-day Russia. The Soviet Union introduced a communist regime of governance that included scalping and controlling consumer goods, naturally leading to corrupt policies (Burke et al., 2011). Ukrainians, under Russian Soviet occupation, became accustomed to corruption, as it was necessary to access informal economies. With time, these systems created an entrenched culture of corruption within the nation and different organizations. Zaloznaya (2012) explains that people's willingness to engage in corruption will change depending on the environment that they are in. Characteristics such as a high sense of individuality and narcissism can contribute to corruption (Burke et al., 2011). Russian corruption has flourished and continues

to affect Ukrainian cultural identity. Corruption replaces traditional Ukrainian identities that value democracy by invading its institutions and working against traditional Ukrainian values.

Corruption has continued in Ukraine since its independence in 1991, as it was a vestige of the Soviet regime's colonialist practices. An essential factor in the slow changes in the willingness to engage in corruption was that Ukrainians continued to see the state as an enemy that should be circumvented by utilizing familial connections and not paying taxes. This is because they were not satisfied with the new ruling structure and politicians that filled it, as many officials have managed to avoid punishment for stolen funds from the state (De Waal, 2016).

After the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, Ukrainian society consciously chose European integration (CPI 2022 For Eastern Europe & Central Asia: Growing Security Risks and Authoritarianism Threaten Progress Against Corruption, 2023). Ordinary citizens wanted to move on from the legacy of Russian corruption but needed more civic will to enact meaningful change. A break was needed from the soft and economic power Russia historically held over Ukraine and a path forward within Europe and EU integration. Citizens of Ukraine became more conscious of breaking the old colonialist power structure, with corruption becoming a much more urgent system of oppression to remove. (Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, 2018). Pro-European, Pro-NATO Ukrainians want to remove these corrupt policies as they impact their culture negatively. This included reforms to the integrity of the courts and an independent law enforcement system, without the interference of oligarchs and other interested parties, and increased transparency of public procurement. In particular, the Prozorro system was introduced, passing all government tenders for purchases or services (De Waal, 2016), further trying to push away from this corrupt identity.

According to Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, 38% of Ukrainian citizens were ready to pay bribes, so changes in combating corruption progressed slowly (Transparency International: The Global Coalition Against Corruption, 2016). According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2022 (2023), Ukraine received 33 points out of 100. The country's score has increased by one point since 2021,

and now Ukraine ranks 116th out of 180 countries in the CPI. By comparison, Canada scores 74/180 on this index.

In Ukraine's continued effort to root out corruption, vital governmental bodies have started under the supervision of international anti-corruption organizations. At first, the authorities, such as the Security Service of Russia (SBU), resisted this partnership, as the Anti-Corruption proved effective. In particular, adopting the state Anti-Corruption Strategy and appointing the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) proved especially effective (Kos, 2022). In January of 2023, abuses were discovered in the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Community and Territorial Development (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, 2023); this further demonstrated the vulnerability of Ukraine's institutions to corruption. However, civil society has become more effective in responding to such situations and involving the public, as shown by immediate legal action against those responsible. By addressing these corrupt policies and their attempt to influence and change cultural identity, Ukrainians can fight against Russian-based corruption and maintain their identities.

Food

Food is a visible aspect of cultural identity, in that certain dishes and foods are served or enjoyed during specific events, seasons, or as part of traditional religious practices. Those connections and practices can be generational and connect people with their historical culture or other cultures worldwide. Food can also be an invisible aspect of cultural identity. Adding chilies or a smoky ingredient may be a personal preference from a family cultural history, not necessarily one that an individual overtly identifies. Food is personal, food is cultural, and food is political. The ingredients a person chooses for a dish or recipe are subject to their connection with it, their own beliefs, and their identity. Some examples of this are in the name brand versus not name brand, whether Heinz ketchup versus French's ketchup is better, or if organic is worth it, to name a few. The connection between the food a person chooses and identity can be seen in any debate over Pepsi or Coke or which country makes the best soy sauce.

 Food is political. An example is when individuals, corporations, or countries control the mode and means of production, influencing how it and its profits are distributed. Ukraine is a central global sunflower, maize, wheat, and barley exporter. When Russia invaded in February 2022, Ukraine's ports were blocked with about 20 million tons of grain. This act of agricultural resource control forced global food prices to all-time highs. Middle Eastern and African food supplies were particularly threatened, as they rely heavily on Ukrainian grain; the UN estimates prices rose by an average of 30% in these regions. This oppressive control resulted in approximately 44 million people in 38 countries facing "emergency levels of hunger." (What is the Ukraine grain deal, and what good has it done? 2023). This resulted in individual or larger-scale consequences and choices around grain purchase. Those who can choose where they purchase their grain may do so with their own cultural identity and beliefs at the forefront of their choice. This resistance to Russian colonization practices, including product control and production, can be seen in the grassroots movements within Ukraine. These movements revolve around purchasing and producing Ukrainian products. "Do not buy Russian goods!" or "Boycott Russian goods!" is a nonviolent resistance campaign to boycott Russian commerce in Ukraine. The resistance to purchasing Russian products started in 2013, but after the full-scale invasion, the movement became popular again.

Food and specific dishes can define a nation through its history, knowledge, and cultural significance. Oppressors can utilize food as a method of control, influence, and a strategy for cultural genocide. They do this by controlling access to food staples, such as buffalo, to the Indigenous people of North America (Weaver, 2012). Buffalo were killed in mass, removing Indigenous people's ability to hunt them and removing the connection they had to the land through their connection with the buffalo (Weaver, 2012). Famine, such as Holdomor, have been created to eliminate groups of people and allow for colonialist control. Holodomor helped redefine and shape preserving techniques, storage strategies, how items are prepared, and what is done with extras. This has had lasting effects on Ukrainian food and cultural identity and continues to define them. Ukrainian cuisine is known for its heavy and hearty dishes, such as borscht, varenyky, and cabbage rolls. In 2022 borscht was formally recognized by UNESCO as a Ukrainian

cultural meal. Borscht is a dish that Russia has tried to culturally appropriate as its own (Forman, 2022). Ukrainian dishes require a lot of time and effort to prepare, but they are very nutritious and satisfy hunger for a long time. The importance of this aspect of Ukrainian cuisine is a necessary form of resistance stemming from Russian-created historical food shortages. It is an act of defiance, especially now with the infrastructure attacks utilized by Russia as part of their current war strategy (Kaidan et al., 2022). This act of resistance shows Ukraine's identity as not Russian.

 Food can be utilized to resist and reclaim the identities of those oppressed while undermining oppressive colonial control systems. Deutsch et al. (2022 note how food can be used to resist communities' oppression and remember their history. Indigenous people of Canada are seeing a revival and new interest in bannock. This has resulted in restaurants such as Pei Pei Chei Ow offering bannock eclairs and earning recognition in Bon Appetit magazine for their education around Indigenous cuisine (For Indigenous Chef Scott Iserhoff, Food is Medicine, 2023). The book *Ukraine Food and History* (Braichenko et al., 2020) explores regional food and histories, proudly sharing their identity and connection to the land. An example of Ukrainian cultural food history comes from an excerpt in *Ukraine Food and History*, where French explorer Guillaume Levasseur de Beauplan discusses Kolomiya salt (Braichenko et al., 2020, p. 23). Guillaume Levasseur de Beauplan wrote in 1651, "They make another sort of salt of elder and oak ash, which is good to eat with bread; they call this salt Kolomey." (Braichenko et al., 2020, p. 23). Salt is essential to food preservation and Ukrainian history and culture, with many recipes using salt-cured lard even today (Braichenko et al., 2020, p. 23). Kolomiya salt comes from saline lakes along the black sea, and Henichesk Salt Lake in Russia annexed Crimea. Russia has claimed a rare form of pink salt that gets its colour from algae in Lake Sasyk on Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula (Excursion to the Salt-Works: a New Tourist "Magnet" Will Appear in Eupatoria, 2019).

The development of a recipe and how it is passed on reflects the culture, and values represent the cultural identity of those creating it. The loss of recipes such as the one for Andarinos (The MNC Editorial team, 2021) have nearly been lost due to changing cultural demands and identities. What was traditionally passed down from family member to family member is now being explored and recorded in cookbooks intent on preserving recipes and cultural history and identity (Bennison, 2019). The reclamation process of cuisine includes identifying the history of specific foods, and locating them within regions, allowing for cultures and identities to be maintained and promoted on the world stage (Braichenko et al., 2020, p. 5). Ukrainian food is a heritage and a way to share their culture with others. Food plays a crucial role in defining Ukrainian culture, as it is an integral part of Ukrainian national identity and reflects the country's history, values, geography, and climate. Food is used to define Ukrainian culture through traditional dishes, festivals and celebrations, regional variations, and cultural pride.

This paper examines how Russian colonialism has impacted Ukrainian cultural identity. This will be done by examining the connections between Russian propaganda, corruption, and food perception concerning Ukrainian cultural identity and how it has shaped Ukraine.

Methodology

Our data collection strategy is to perform semi-structured interviews with questions composed by the researchers for this project. The research participants, or interviewees, are drawn from our fellow students in the SOCI 395 class from MacEwan University and CCO-20/Б group from Ukrainian Catholic University. Seven students were interviewed, three from MacEwan University in Canada and four from Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine. The participants were student volunteers from various backgrounds. Each interview contained an interviewer from MacEwan University and Ukrainian Catholic University. This aimed to reduce language barriers or culture-specific cues that may be misinterpreted due to cross-cultural miscommunication. Data was collected via an interview using an online video meeting application. The interviews were recorded for transcription purposes.

Ethics

The interviews had the following ethical considerations in place. The interviews for our project will not be anonymous (as participants are our classmates). Steps were taken to keep the identities of the interviewees

confidential. Only the researchers in the group had access to the interviewees' identities, which are stored on a secure Google doc with restricted access. Once all the interviews were conducted, the data was transcribed without any identifiable info, resulting in anonymous data storage and further use. Participants volunteered and verbally consented to the interview. The participants could withdraw consent at any time during the interview, as consent is an ongoing process. Also, discuss the potential risks and benefits of research participation.

Procedures

We conducted seven interviews over seven days; the interviews lasted up to 30 minutes. We started the interview with an explanation of the procedure, an assurance of confidentiality, and pointed out the risks that may be present during and after its implementation. We followed the guide and started with a warm-up question: "What is cultural identity to you?". Next, we asked about the respondent's self-identification experience and factors that may influence cultural identity. Then we moved to the block of questions about the perception or non-perception of Russia as a colonialist state. After that, we became interested in the attitude towards corruption, Ukrainian food, and its identity. Finally, we asked questions about the perception of Ukraine in the international community and thoughts on Russian propaganda. Additionally, we were interested in whether the completed course influenced the perception of Ukraine among Canadian students. We ended the interview with an open-ended question asking if the participant had anything that they wished to add or elaborate on.

Transcripts from each participant were broken down into a single document with individual responses separated by question. This was done to give the researchers easy access and analysis of each question and the interviewers' responses. From there, a table was created where the researcher placed their individual themes concerning each interviewee's responses. After all, responses were analyzed for initial themes, the researchers then examined those for comparison to others, resulting in the development of the final four themes. Finally, the researcher defined those themes clearly, created a final collum on the document, and cross-checked those themes against the original interviewee's answers.

Results

Through the analysis of the interviews, four over-arching themes were identified: Ukrainian Resistance, Conscious Worldview Change, Russian Irredentism, and Unity.

Ukrainian Resistance

Respondents believed that Ukraine resisted Russia's influence when asked about cultural identity, colonialism, corruption, food resistance, and propaganda concerning Ukraine. Ukrainian resistance was defined as a refusal to accept Russia's colonialist ideologies. They were reclaiming identity, history, and culture separate from the historical narratives perpetuated by Russian colonization. Ukrainian resistance involved an individual who stood up for Ukraine, the Ukrainian people, and human rights. These openly and unbashful people represent who Ukrainians are now and historically.

Reclaiming. Many participants stated that they had taken an active role in learning about Ukraine's history and culture and embracing it. One respondent added that "*my family originally spoke Russian but started to speak Ukrainian daily to stand against Russia,*" speaking to how many families in Ukraine had to take an active role in learning and embracing their culture. This also affects the preservation of Ukrainian traditions and ideals, such as borscht and intolerance of corruption. One respondent added, "*Ukraine is reclaiming what was thought to be Russian culture, such as Ukrainian food,*" showing that reclamation and resistance are happening in Ukraine. That resistance is demonstrated in the way a participant described the separation of Ukrainian culture from Russia *"I know that they've [Ukrainians] been like fighting to have foods that are important to their culture labelled as their own to show that those foods…should be properly associated with Ukraine and not with Russia"*.

Being or Becoming Political. Being political also came up in many of the respondent's interviews in terms of resistance. This included awareness of Russia's history, policies, and world affairs. One participant stated, *"We used to eat this really good dish, but it was Russian, and many people stopped eating it as it's their political position."* By realizing what was Russian and Russian influenced, Ukrainians actively resisted it. This

political stance also included Pro European stances, as reflected in this participant's response *"I would say that… right now, our Ukrainian cultural identity is very pro-European".* The people we interviewed mentioned how Ukraine was trying to become a member of the European Union as its principles and values are similar to Ukraine's. One respondent mentioned, *"European Union is very intolerant to corruption and propaganda, and Ukraine also holds these values, unlike Russia."* This further shows how Ukrainians resist Russia by becoming political.

Refusal of Russian Ideologies. Another example of this Ukrainian resistance in our interviews came from the refusal of Russian ideologies. Ukraine was, of course, tied to Russia during the Soviet Union era. Even after the Soviet Union fell, Ukraine still had Russia as a neighbour and influencer. Russian influences in Ukraine include arts, music, food education, and government officials, to name a few. A participant mentioned that *"some family members are currently in occupied land by Russia, and it is hard for them to resist Russian ideologies such as education and food but still try."* Even in occupied land, Ukrainians refuse Russian ideologies such as corruption and propaganda. This refusal of Russian ideology, values, and beliefs can be as simple as Russian food. Many respondents mentioned that cutting out historically Russian food was a great way to stand up to refuse Russian policies.

Representation of Who They Are. Lastly, what we found in terms of Ukrainian resistance was the idea that this Ukrainian resistance was a representation of Ukrainians as a society and who they are as a people. This includes a mosaic of cultures, shared customs, Ukraine as different and distinct from Russia, and locating themselves as part of the land. One respondent mentioned that *"I continue living in Ukraine it's a part of me,"* further adding that Ukraine is more than just a country; it is a representation of the people living there. In addition, even when Russia tries to remove the traditions and values of Ukrainians, they find a way to resist. As one respondent said, *"Traditions have been lost in occupied lands due to Russia, but we won't give up."* By showing their resistance to Russia, the participants felt that they, in the process, were being true to themselves. A participant explained how *"around Ukraine, different cultures that are different from each other. Not because of the war. It can be*

because of the influence of Russia, like from the history and also because of our history situation," demonstrating the long history of Ukraine and the multitude of cultures that call it home.

Conscious Worldview Change

Conscious worldview change was a core theme tied to the results of our research. It is defined here as the intentional and unintentional process of transforming one's fundamental beliefs, values, culture, and assumptions about the world, identity, and culture. This process involves critically examining one's worldview, questioning its validity and coherence, and considering alternative perspectives and ways of thinking. The change can affect one's own cultural identity. It is a way of understanding who you are, where you came from, and what has changed.

Who You Are and What Has Changed. A common thread found in the research analysis was the idea of understanding who you are, where you came from, and what has changed. As one of our participants noted, *"While we were occupied by a different country, this made me closer to my identity."* Other participants echoed similar ideas such as *"exploring history and education,"* and one even mentioned how *"it was through education arts, history, and music that I was able to reclaim my culture and understand myself."* This re-examination included Canadians examining what it means to be a Canadian, as expressed by one participant *"I think once you… start to understand Canadians and Canadian culture, then you start to understand, Oh my gosh, there's a lot of people that fit into that identity.".* Some changes happened due to the SOCI 395 class from MacEwan University and the group from Ukrainian Catholic University's collaborative coursework. This re-examination can also be seen in this statement by a Canadian participant *"I was aware of the war, and I was paying attention to it as much as probably anyone in Canada was through social media and seeing things, but then in this class, learning more about the history and then interacting with actual …Ukrainians who are in Ukraine …we grew a connection.".* By understanding what has happened in their lives and where they came from, participants in our study were able to reaffirm what was important to them and reshape and grow their cultural identity.

Social Movement and Political Involvement. By reaffirming and reclaiming their identities, participants also cited that social movements and political involvement were crucial to cultural identities and perceptions. One of the ways that identities and perceptions could change was through social media. One respondent noted, *"It is a problem how easily our people can be swayed by misinformation on social media."* Participants also noted how *"misinformation was actively changing people's worldview for the worse"* and that *"this propaganda can lead to negative views on Ukrainian identity and culture."*

Many in this study also stated that becoming more aware of politics helped them to separate Ukraine from Russia and reduce the Russian narrative that they are the same. This is demonstrated in this statement by a participant *"I would say probably in recent years, once I was a little bit more of an adult and I started paying more attention to politics, I was a little bit more aware of Russia, I will say actually even right before this class I didn't realize how to separate the identities of Russia and Ukraine are."* Social movements in Ukraine were noted around a cultural change in foods specific for celebrations. Several participants discussed Olivier Salad *" it's a very popular salad, but it's often called for New Year's Eve. And it's like a very solid dish, and it's just associated with all this Soviet heritage, yeah. And many people stopped cooking it and eating it and like, it's their political position".*

Awareness. Lastly, concerning conscious worldview change, our participants noted that they had gained awareness that they did not have before. For instance, one study member mentioned, *"When I was growing up, I didn't realize what Russia was doing at the time. Still, after the invasion of Crimea, my perception changed."* In addition, some participants noted that *"they didn't even know there was a difference between Russia and Ukraine for the longest time,"* further speaking to how awareness grew and changed over time. By being more aware of Russia and Ukraine's ongoing situation, our participants stated that their perceptions and *"cultural identities"* have changed and been reshaped. This awareness can also be shaped for the worse, such as corrupt media and using propaganda to promote a message. For example, one respondent stated, *"Doing due diligence, you can see that some things on media sites that are wrong or misinformation*

that changes the viewers' perception." If the individual is unaware of the information they are consuming, they can *"easily be swayed,"* as found in the interview analysis.

Russian Irredentism

Russian irredentism is defined as advocating the restoration of a country formerly belonging to it, for example, Russia advocated for the acquisition of Ukrainian land because it was once part of the former Soviet Union. This was another central theme we found in our interviews and analysis. Russian irredentism creates a narrative that Ukraine has always been a part of Russia. Russia justifies its war on Ukraine by creating and implementing policies to reinforce that narrative within the invaded territory and Russia. Russia is colonizing territory and attacking the sovereignty of other countries while justifying it through various pro-Russia ideologies and narratives.

Colonization. Many participants stated how Russia was attempting to re-colonize Ukraine and that they considered being a colonizing nation to be part of Russian cultural identity. For instance, one of our respondents noted, *"Yes, we can see the colonization of Russia with the full-scale invasion of Crimea."* This sentiment of Russian actions showing their true intentions was shared amongst all interviewed. One participant explained how cultural control part of Russia's colonizing intentions is: *"We can see from the action that Russia does, Russia is doing right now that the statement about colonizing fits perfectly. They just want to get political and economic and cultural control."*

The colonizing actions by Russia included but were not limited to *"warfare, political intimidation, food insecurity, cultural erasion, and propaganda".* One participant pointed out the history of Russian colonization of other countries *"Russia is known for actually acting illegally towards other countries [for example] in 1999 in northern Chechnya".* Another participant explained Russia's one-country ideology: *"They want to take full control over Ukraine and other countries to make only one center in it and to make everything work by their rules and decisions."*

Justification. Another idea that was found was that Russia was trying to justify its war with Ukraine. They

tried to do this with multiple avenues to take the blame off of themselves. Our respondents mentioned multiple excuses made by Russia, such as *"Nazism"* or *"Ukrainians are incapable of taking care of themselves."* Russia has, therefore, stated that Ukraine requires saving and that only Russia has the power to save it. One participant even noted that *"they have been talking about taking Ukrainian kids out of Ukraine to be taught in Russian schools,"* further adding that Ukrainian identity is unacceptable for one to possess. Even further, this also showed Russia's attempt to erase Ukrainian history.

Cultural Genocide. As one member of the interviews mentioned, *"their goal is to take over Ukrainians and their history,"* showing Russia as a culture that wants to destroy Ukrainian history. Also found in the analysis of the interviews was the attempt to erase the identity and culture of Ukraine. This included many methods such as *"food control and suppression, corrupt policies such as the removal of children, propaganda in the media and creating control such as annexation"* As one respondent put it, *"Russia is a country trying to strip the identity of another country."*

Russian Propaganda. Lastly, concerning the theme of Russian irredentism was the recognition of propaganda and its use in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A clear example of this was the villainization of Ukraine in the media. As a participant in the research stated, *"Russians are trying to paint themselves as the good guys,"* further justifying themselves in the war using saviour propaganda. The saviour role can be seen in this participant's statement *"I've heard… the amount of propaganda that's going on in Russia about how they're trying to help Ukraine and how they're saving Ukraine, and it's very clear that is not the case because there have been so many atrocities in Ukraine".*

Another effect of Russian propaganda is that other nations, such as China and Iran, believe what Russia is doing in Ukraine is noble and righteous. One participant noted, *"The amount of propaganda going on makes it seem like Russia is helping Ukraine."* In addition, another instance of propaganda influencing other countries was noted by another participant who said, *"Some nations would say not to help Ukraine given the misinformation,"* pointing to the effectiveness of propaganda.

Unity

The fourth and final core theme we identified was Unity. This research defines unity as a commonality against the common enemy, standing up for human rights and democratic values, and fighting colonialism. Unity took multiple forms in the interviews, such as support from allies. For example, one interviewee mentioned that *"Western nations such as the U.S. and Europe are helping us a lot,"* speaking to how other nations have resonated with Ukraine and their values and cultures to help them. Other forms of support identified were *"military aid such as weapons, health care packages, and capital."*

Pride and Community. Pride and community were other subthemes identified within unity. One of the participants stated that *"it seems that Ukraine is more united than ever,"* showing that Ukraine has come together as a community and has pride in its culture and identity. In addition, one participant also noted that *"I will continue to be an ally to Ukraine and my Ukrainian friends,"* showing that this pride and community has reached even past Ukraine and has reached the international community. With this support, this community is standing against Russia, its corrupt policies, and its propaganda and is working towards a better future.

Common and Shared Values. Common and shared cultures were also found regarding unity in the interview analysis. As our participants mentioned, common ground must be shared to come together as an influential community. This includes traditional Ukrainian foods, traditions, values, beliefs, and cultural practices. As one respondent mentioned, *"Ukrainians wanted to learn more about their country and have rediscovered traditions, foods, etc."* By identifying and supporting these values, beliefs, traditions, and food, Ukraine has been able to reclaim its culture and have common ground. Food was also found to be a significant part of a nation's history, tradition, and cultural identity. One interviewee said, *"What people eat tells us about their history, geographical location, finances, and much more."* Food, therefore, was seen as a critical identifier of a nation and cultural identity.

Institutions and Society. Institutions and society were the last subthemes we identified regarding unity in our research. The institutions mentioned that were essential

to unity included *"education, healthcare, and politics."* By rooting out corrupt policies in these institutions, overall unity will be more substantial in a nation. As one participant mentioned, *"Corruption can be compared to a virus that just makes institutions fail and the state weak."* Having strong institutions and rooting out corrupt policies, unity in Ukraine would increase.

Discussion

This research has explored the many effects of Russian colonialism on Ukrainian cultural identity, highlighting the essential themes of unity, Ukrainian resistance, Russian irredentism, and conscious worldview change. Our results indicate that Russian colonial practices implemented through propaganda, continued corruption promotion, food traditions, histories, and ideologies have negatively impacted Ukrainian cultural identity, but Ukrainian identity is resisting.

There has been a significant influence of Russian colonialism practices on Ukrainian cultural identity. Explicit attempts to eradicate Ukraine's culture, traditions, and values and create the illusion of a shared history between Ukraine and Russia were seen in the research. The Ukrainian language was oppressed when Russia occupied Ukraine, affecting societal norms, customs, and collective memory. During the existence of the Soviet Union, all policies and economic decisions were made in favour of Russia, which in turn caused inequality and hindered Ukraine's economic and democratic development, both pre and post-independence, which led to a suppression of cultural identity.

One of the outcomes found in the research is that Russian propaganda manufactured questions about true Ukrainian cultural identity both within and outside its borders. Through propaganda, Russia has attempted to control the narrative about Ukraine and its people. Russian colonialism affected educational and language policies in Ukraine. Such policies were aimed to Russify Ukrainian society. As a result, the Russian language and literature began to prevail in Ukrainian education, and Russian became the dominant language of instruction. Russia also created policies that limited access to education and books in the Ukrainian language.

During the Soviet Union, Ukraine was subject to Russia in all spheres, including the legal and justice system. This limited the Ukrainian legal system and the ability of Ukrainians to create their own system according to their cultural and societal needs and values. Russia attempted to destroy Ukrainian culture to replace it with its own, thus creating a shared cultural space to justify the myth of brotherly nations. This meant that the nation of Ukraine had its identity suppressed. Russia's propaganda drowned out Ukraine's culture and values. By having Ukraine look like Russia, other nations would also start believing this false narrative. In addition, Ukraine's institutions, such as education and legal systems, became distorted with misinformation and falsehood. With its institutions under propaganda, Ukraine's culture and beliefs were viewed as wrong, and a pro-Russian agenda was correct.

This research demonstrates that Russia has created social inequality in Ukraine through our literature review and the lived experience of our Ukrainian interviewees. Russia has previously installed pro-Russian leaders in Ukraine through corrupt means, resulting in protests such as the Orange Revolution. Russia has attempted to appropriate Ukrainian cuisine as its own and control access to Ukrainian agricultural products at home and aboard. Binelli et al. (2015. pg 246) acknowledge the impacts of social inequality on a nation on the world stage and its lasting impacts on its society. Russia has been using colonialist practices to create inequality for Ukraine and its people. Systems of corruption were designed and built for the advancement of the Soviet and Russian elite to the detriment of the Ukrainian people. While systems of corruption may still be active in some capacity within Ukrainian society, the implementation of Anti-Corruption practices and policies demonstrates how the people of Ukraine do not claim this as part of their cultural identity and how corruption still invades Ukrainian social institutions. Therefore, Ukraine has taken a stance against corrupt policies and has promoted its values, such as democracy.

Another result of our research is that food is a vital part of Ukrainian cultural identity. With familiar and shared food, such as Borscht, Varenyky, and Nalysnyky, Ukrainians could resist Russian pressures and have a voice in the international community. In addition, by recognizing this food as Ukrainian, all the stories and

its history are also part of the Ukrainian collective. All of these stories and heritages that food like borscht has stored within reinforce Ukraine's culture and it is identity not just for individuals but for the whole of Ukraine as well.

There is also unity in the political resistance of pro-Soviet era food, such as Oliver salad. This helps to resist the colonist attempt of Russia to blur the differences between Russian and Ukrainian identities. Becoming more aware of history, food, and recipes allows Ukrainian culture to demonstrate its vast history and diversity.

Our research findings also demonstrate the resilience of the Ukraine people in the face of Russia. Ukrainians refused the Russian language and became more political after the initial invasion of Crimea and the Donbas in 2014. Standing up to Russia in this manner reinforced to Ukraine and the world that they had an identity that was not shared with Russia. This cultural push against Russian institutions and colonization increased with the full-scale invasion by Russia in February 2022. That increase can be seen in the purging of corruption in Ukrainian politics and declarations by the current Ukrainian president about Ukraine's desire to join NATO and the EU. The people's resilience in Ukraine could also be seen in the refusal to consume Soviet-era dishes. This was not just one person but entire towns refusing Russian cuisines, further speaking to a reinforced cultural identity.

Russian irredentism still influences Ukrainian society, justifying their actions within Ukraine, to the Russian civilian population, and worldwide, using different types of propaganda. Nonetheless, our research demonstrates that Ukrainians actively resist Russian narratives, histories, institutions, and values and formulate their own based on EU democratic values. Policies being developed and implemented by the current Ukrainian government are a testament to the resistance to Russian colonization.

While Russia has been propagating narratives of justification, attempting to corrupt the view of Ukraine worldwide and appropriating Ukrainian history, this research shows that Ukrainian cultural identity is becoming stronger. By strengthening their cultural identity, Ukrainians make it exponentially harder for Russia to colonize them. This is demonstrated by the

way people are becoming more political. Pro-European and pro-NATO ideologies are more vital now with Ukrainians than they were before Russia's invasion in 2014. Entire households have changed language as a refusal to accept Russian colonization and the annexation of Crimea. Tradition reclamation, food promotion and resistance have become part of the cultural promotion of Ukraine.

People outside of Ukraine who do not have as much of a personal stake in the Russian-made war feel Ukraine's strength and stand united with them. A strong connection was made between the Canadians from SOCI 395 and their counterparts, with many becoming fast friends. This resulted in the Canadians developing an emotional connection and personal investment in the outcome of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Those sentiments were predominant when participants were asked how they viewed Ukraine and Ukrainian identity.

According to this research, while Russian colonialism has negatively impacted Ukrainian cultural identity, it has also had a positive impact. Ukraine is more united than ever as its international relationships, institutions, and people strive for a better future. Ukraine has managed to strengthen its cultural identity in the face of Russian colonization and created an allyship identity with other pro-European, pro-NATO, and pro-liberal democratic nations.

This research demonstrates that as Ukrainian cultural identity continues to strengthen around themes such as resistance, unity, and conscious worldview change, Russian Irredentism will become less and less possible.

Limitations

Limitations of the study include the research pool. All participants were members of the SOCI 395 class from MacEwan University and CCO-20/Б group from Ukrainian Catholic University. This research also involved students under constant threat by an invading country, and the research in its nature was challenging.

Further Research

Further research should include a more extensive examination of cultural identity formation while under invasion from external forces. Further research on Ukrainian allyship should be completed on a larger scale and across pro-European, pro-NATO, and pro-

liberal democratic nations and other nations. Different factors, including social movements within a culture or community, contribute to developing resistance, unity and conscious worldview change as part of cultural identity development.

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