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A LAND WHEREIN THOU ART A STRANGER: 
Notes on Ukrainian National Identity

Benjamin J. P. Peters

ABSTRACT

Selection from an Honors thesis in partial fulfillment of University Honors. Ben Peters examines Ukrainian national identity as a contemporary phenomenon fraught with tensions and paradoxes. Here in the introduction and final chapter of his undergraduate thesis, Peters briefly presents, first, Ukrainian national identity in light of a number of theoretical approaches (e.g., Herder, Renan, Honig, Benjamin, Smith, and Anderson) and then turns his attention toward synthesizing observations about Ukrainian architecture of public space (e.g., monuments, institutions, symbols) into two general themes of Ukrainian national identity: national otherness and resurrection. When seen as the Hegelian "other," Ukrainian history leads toward an internal intolerance of identity. Instead, Peters suggests that dismissing the label "other" and not those labeled "others" in historical and present situations provides a fertile soil in which a Ukrainian national identity capable of meeting the demands of democracy may develop.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON UKRAINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

If nations are actors on the stage of their state, then independent Ukraine since 1991 has the script and cast for a world-class soap opera. Members of the Ukrainian collective squabble over cultural inheritance, the closest of ethnicities clash, and religious zealots boil over inheritance claims. Ukraine today struggles to stabilize its many conflicting characters—jealousy, heated spats, and grudges are not uncommon spices in brewing the modern Ukrainian nation. Altogether, Ukraine makes for a fantastic drama.

Ukraine also makes a sterling subject to study Eastern European national neighborhoods. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's former National Security Adviser, called Ukrainian independence "one of the three major geopolitical events of the twentieth century" because
Russia, that great historical empire, would not rise again to superpower status as long as Ukraine remains independent (Zbigniew 1996, 3–8; Wilson 2002, 368). The Ukrainian nation then is a modern milestone of Russia's post-imperial legacy—its independence indirectly means that a superpower is no more. In the words of Benedict Anderson, a nation, as all other imagined communities, is sovereign but limited. Ukraine is becoming a nation in these terms but is neither completely sovereign nor aware of its limitations. Neither Ukrainian confines nor power are fully formed: Ukraine is not yet entirely sovereign nor is it perhaps even adequately aware of its limitations because Ukrainians on the whole do not yet have a common understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian. As Anatolii Pohribnyi, former Minister of Education, forewarns, “[Ukraine] cannot . . . pull [itself] out of economic crisis without uniting the clear majority of the population around the national idea” (Wilson 2002, 235). This work attempts to help address the creation of that Ukrainian national idea.

To study independent Ukraine is to watch an important balancing of future and past: as Ukraine tries to unite behind its new role as Eastern Europe’s post-Soviet flagship of independence, it also ought to account for the historic pluralism that tends to divide its population. Left to watch any one episode of Ukraine’s recent, knotty history, most outside observers would be left dumbfounded by the diversity and disunion found within its boundaries. Yet despite recent national independence placing Ukraine delicately upon an edge between Europe and Russia, Catholicism and Orthodoxy, West and East, Ukrainian’s pluralism also carries a productive potential in terms of developing a consensual national identity. And what Tocqueville said, “Democratic ages are times of experiment, innovation, and adventure” holds true for contemporary Ukrainian nation-building. All democracies, but especially new ones, are constantly in a state of flux and fluidity—concrete national identity is impossible in democratic societies without a built-in societal consensus toward tolerating foreignness among its natives.

What is a nation? I will try to follow Anderson’s superb prescription that a nation is an “imagined [not imaginary] community . . . limited and sovereign” (1996, 7). Ukraine as a nation with borders functions as an evolving organism formed by two interacting, interwoven substances—or as Ernest Barker, distinguished British political theorist, describes “a nation [as something that] is simultaneously, and coextensively, two things in one. It is a social substance, or Society . . . [and] a legal substance; a single compulsory association . . . to make and enforce rules for all” (Barker 1956, 4). Conflict between differing social groups in Ukraine is largely kept in check by legal oversight; yet justification for disobedience to the state among these groups draws heavily upon centuries of predemocratic social-state relations, while state oversight falters out of inexperience. Some historical elements of the Ukrainian nation are centuries old, but Ukraine as a nation-state has only existed since the early 1990s. In brief, while only one section of this essay is dedicated to the legal situation in Ukraine per se, compulsory policies and politics between the state and society pervade discussion throughout. As illustrated in Ukraine’s case, a nation is a sovereign community limited by its relative composition of and compromise between social and compulsory components.
To understand the origins of nation, one must consider two leading concepts that have shaped debate over the past two centuries. One is Renan’s endorsement of forgetting the past to develop national solidarity, and the other is Herder’s claim that a nation is organically rooted in a historical folk or people. The first is a synchronic argument, the second diachronic. Either a nation is born of imagined memory or out of the very dirt of organic fact. This dialectic between inventive remembering and forgetting remains key to the following discussion of Ukraine. In brief, the battle between mind and blood, politics and history, collective memory and its misplacement will ultimately define independent Ukraine as a nation. For democracy to succeed, a nation must be amenable to a new set of national memories that can allow its present people to accept diversity and difference of organic characteristics (e.g., language, ethnicity, religion).

Some see history as nothing but the web of stories about the past; others see it as a professional academic field of inquiry; and yet others see history as the factual content of past time, things as they “really” happened. Here history will refer to that mutable record of roots that resurrects the past into the present and defines the collective potential, memory, and consciousness of a people. As Walter Benjamin (1968) argues, history enlivens the past only by being a version of the present. Especially because Ukraine’s history is a composite of foreign nations and alien entities, Ukrainians need to unravel their patchwork of painful history and abstract their own modern national identity to embrace its many contributors. The questions between “us” and “other” will be answered by the modern rendering of Ukrainian history. We need to, as Bonnie Honig argues, switch the question from “how should we solve the problem of foreignness” to the question “what problems does foreignness solve for us” (2001)—in other words, only that which is the “other” in Ukraine can liberate Ukrainian identity from the bonds of historical resentment into present equivalence for all its people. The “other” in Ukraine is not the problem—it is the solution.

What is national identity? Anthony D. Smith’s five fundamental features of national identity provide a platform for investigating the embryonic formation of claimed ancient Ukrainian identity. According to this formula, a successful Ukrainian national identity would require

1. A historic territory, or homeland,
2. Common myths and historical memories,
3. A common, mass public culture,
4. Common legal rights and duties for all members, and
5. A common economy with territorial mobility for members. (1991, 14)

Commonality is perhaps the stickiest subject for Ukraine: are memories, myths, and culture truly common or do they remain only because of collectively imposed Soviet nation-building policies? Probably the latter, but it remains a question. I will argue that in some sense foreigners have done more—by fanning Ukrainian nationalism in the Canadian Diaspora or by simply occupying the area—to create Ukraine today than Ukrainian polity or policy have had time to do themselves. The race to make Ukraine is run today by natives trying to catch up with what foreigners have done or are doing.
Who, then, is a Ukrainian today? A brief demographic sketch of Ukraine reveals about 49 million inhabitants in a little over 600,000 square kilometers (an area slightly smaller than Texas). Ukraine is thus the largest country in European Eurasia besides Russia (U.S. State Department 2002). Ukrainian history houses the mixed political legacies of the Soviet Union, Russia, Poland, Lithuia, the Cossacks, the Hapsburg empire, and Kyiv Rus as well as the religions of Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, and Paganism. Ethnic groups include, in descending order, Ukrainians (73%), Russians (22%), Jews, Belarusians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, Crimean Tatars, and others. The rubrics of Ukrainian and Russian ethnicity often are politicized and misleading. Many citizens of Russian ancestry claim Ukrainian ethnicity out of allegiance to territory rather than actual genealogy, skewing true ethnic distinctions. Traditional religious movements include Ukrainian Orthodoxyes (of Moscow and Kyiv Patriarchates and other less prominent variants), Greek Catholicism, Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Islam.

Ukraine has no simple majority along religious, political, ethnic, linguistic, or even economic lines. Economically, the nation’s predicted 2002 GDP was near 40 billion USD (a 4.1% increase since 2001). This remains surprisingly small compared to its European neighbors to the west.

Ukrainian internal divisions are largely due to its history with neighboring nations. Perhaps the political question for Ukraine in the twenty-first century follows: with which neighbors will it choose to seek the most affiliation and communication? East or West? Before the fall of Communism, John A. Armstrong treated the Soviet Republic of Ukraine as a “younger brother” of Russia (together with Belarus) in understanding post-Communist Ukraine. Now, however, we must also investigate independent Ukraine’s split relationships with its neighboring nations. The European Union is looking more and more attractive to western Ukraine, while economic alliance with Russia remains the primary interest of eastern Ukraine. The elusive answer to the question “what Ukrainians consider to be Ukrainian” lies in how those within Ukraine’s borders will treat those beyond its borders.

IDENTITY IN OTHERNESS AND HISTORY, DEATH AND RESURRECTION

“And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger . . . for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8).

The Judeo-Christian tradition of inheritance (seed), possession (territory), and exile (stranger) are central to Ukrainian national identity. Much like when Abram (later known as Abraham) received the land of Canaan as his divinely appointed inheritance, the newly formed Ukrainian state in 1991 received its land as a stranger. In a strong sense, Ukraine is a stranger in its own land. This will be better demonstrated as I trace two themes in Ukrainian national identity: the presence of otherness and the prevalence of death and resurrection.

OTHERNESS IN NATIONALITY

As the historian Lord Acton once said, “Exile is the mother of nationalism.” Ukraine has been an exile cast upon itself. The idea of alienness is closely associated with the idea of
land: typically those who possess the land are entitled to make the distinction between the near-cognates extraterrestrial (i.e., alien) and extra-territorial (i.e., foreigner)—however, in Ukraine the distinction between alien and foreigner is obscured as is the land’s possessor. In Ukraine has historically been its own alien: Constantinople, Poland-Lithuania, Russian Muscovy, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Moscow have all contributed to a contemporary Ukrainian national identity—they, Ukraine’s historical possessors, were not what Ukraine is.

Whom we recognize as “other” is perhaps the ultimate political question; it is not about how, but with whom we interact that forms the whole human order. For instance, academics in the Ukrainian Diaspora in Canada have ostensibly kept alive Ukrainian nationalism and, with it, a version of Ukrainian identity characterized by the anti-Russian Orthodox sentiment prevalent during the Soviet era. Much like their original national prophet Taras Shevchenko, who was stranded in alien Russia, expatriate Ukrainian nationalists fought most vigorously for a distant homeland. Because he is the quintessential epitome of exile, Shevchenko also makes for a resilient source of collective identity. He wrote the bulk of his nationalistic poetry from the then remote capital of St. Petersburg. Such a textual Diaspora breeds life. In fact the word Diaspora, related to our spore, comes from Greek for dispersion, dissemination, or sowing about of seeds—in other words, foreign soil brings new life to seeds of distant nations. The Diaspora defines the field of the very thing it is not, a national homeland.

Borders magnify national distinctions. Between Ukrainian borders, the words of foreigners—be they imperialist and ecclesiastical rulers or displaced and disaffected nationalists—have been history’s law. Now, Ukrainians would do well to recognize the historical and contemporary presence of otherness found in the territory between their borders. In short, the outsider has largely defined Ukrainian national identity to date.

If consciousness, as Hegel’s parable puts it, is “itself the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself is both, and the unity of both is also its own essence,” then Ukraine is awakening to its true essence, the presence of the other within itself (1807, 251). Ukraine has long viewed itself, its history, and its future through the eyes of others—now, looking deep into the reflective pool of Ukrainian social territory and texts, it finds the eyes of another staring intently back.

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

In an interview with the Russian national newspaper Izvestia on 11 September 2003, Ukrainian President Kuchma said, “What is the main holiday for Catholics, and what is the main one for us? They have Christmas—Christ was born; we have Easter—Christ rose from the dead. In Ukraine, in order to be understood, you have to die first” (Radio Free Europe 2003). The prevalence of evidence on national death and resurrection in public space exposes the life force behind many conflicting national memories during millennia of national otherness. Death, after all, signifies life past—that which is dead once lived. Ukraine is a historical graveyard, and a contemporary garden, identities.

Modern Ukrainian national identity is steeped in past death; nearly all claims made for national identification are paralleled by both termination and rejuvenation of life. The
University of Petro Mohyla Academy was restored in 1991 as the largest, most prestigious private university in Kyiv—characterized by strong nationalist publications meant to create a Ukrainian intellectual spirit through a sort of "nonprofit entrepreneurship" that energetically drives the faculty at Mohyla Academy to restore lost national virtues and cachet among educated readers.4

Yet death has spread at least two shadows over their work toward national revitalization. The first, in responding to the "denationalization" of Ukraine during the Russian and Soviet rule, Mohyla Academy recognizes the enervating loss of national spirit. After all, historical defeat—the death and dependency of the Ukrainian nation to outside empires—could only be fought so vigorously by Ukrainian scholars given an almost universal interpretation of national defeat from foreign scholars.

The second and more interestingly explicit recognition of death is in the Academy's own name and placement: "Mohyla" (Могиля in both Russian and Ukrainian) means grave, an odd yet more appropriate name than most because Mohyla Academy's campus is built upon the vestiges of 1615 Petro Mohyla's (an early Ukrainian Orthodox metropolitan, educator, and Cossack leader) original academy of higher education that was dismantled and transported to St Petersburg in 1815.5 On the nominal and literal grave of higher education arises, like the phoenix from its ashes, modern Ukrainian national education. Accepting and then turning to fight death has become a modern way of life for many educated Ukrainians.

Religious undertones and overtones unite public death and life in Ukraine. Soviet and modern public monuments unanimously celebrate national conception and even more visibly (though not intentionally) national death. The 1980 Brezhnev-built leviathan of Soviet statues in Kyiv, the Mother of the Motherland (Матерійна Матір), towers over the Dnieper River with sword stretched in stalwart pose, reminding Kyiv of its double role as protector in war and life-source of Slavic history. The statue stands in the center of the city's vast World War II memorial complex and right above the Park of Eternal Glory dedicated to commemorating past death inflicted at the hands of history and glorifying, Soviet-style, the longevity of the Ukrainian nation. Although many consider the leviathan statue a Soviet scar, no action is being taken to remove it. Only the nearby steeple of the Pechersk Complex of the Moscow Orthodox Patriarchate stands higher than the sword of the Mother of the Motherland statue. The sword was supposedly shortened immediately after it was built because the Russian Orthodox Church pressured Brezhnev to avoid blaspheming God by placing the state higher than the church. The parallel is unnerving: wartime monuments are built in honor of personal sacrifice (i.e., the loss of life) for national longevity while monuments in honor of Orthodox religion are founded on the idea of life after death (i.e., resurrection).

Other public monuments include the marbled grave of Kyiv Orthodox Patriarch Volodymyr, which lies near a bus stop on a central public square a few meters outside the entrance to the resplendent Divine Wisdom Cathedral, an awkward result of a religious squabble in 1995 over the placement of religious graves on public grounds.6 It is not surprising that Shevchenko fills his paintings with crosses and graves that draw the center of
attention. As another example of life and death in one institution, the Nikolaevskyi Roman Catholic cathedral in downtown Kyiv was built just before it was taken over by the Soviets and converted into a “Silencer”—a storage silo for equipment to silence international radio broadcasts. Now, restored to its original function, the cathedral hosts international choirs and organ recitals. Once a disruptor of radio waves, the cathedral now transmits its own melody for all to hear. It, like much in Ukraine, has undergone a turnabout of signals—from static to sound, from death to life. As in Ukrainian Orthodoxy, as in Ukrainian culture, death is as active as life.

But perhaps the most symbolic union of death, rebirth, and modern Ukrainian identity is the Christian cross. The Christian cross has become such a common occurrence since independence that its significance almost disappears in Ukrainian culture like leaves do on a tree. For instance, although a Soviet military cemetery in downtown Kyiv was bereft of crosses until 1991, practically every additional gravestone placed since bears a cross. Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz said profoundly of a cross erected at the site where the body of a slain reporter—Heorhiy Gongadze—was found, “This is not just a symbol of the death of a man, this is a symbol of truth, of the fight for truth.” Thus topping Mafioso jewelry, political rhetoric, and rural hilltops alike, the cross crowns many actors and institutes of modern Ukrainian culture, symbolizing the religious zenith of popular identity and evidencing the strong prevalence of death and resurrection as key ideological ornaments with which Ukrainians decorate their public spaces, services, and lives. Although the crosses come in many varieties (e.g., if a figure of Christ’s body is attached to a cross, a Greek Catholic crucifix has one nail through both feet, while an Orthodox crucifix has a nail through each foot), the social connotation is the same: Ukraine remembers death and resurrection as part of its collective conscience.

A Jewish memorial at Babi Yar (where the Nazis exterminated over 100,000 Jews in Kyiv) evokes renewed life from death in three languages (Ukrainian, English, and Yiddish) with an inscribed winged angel carrying a crossed shield and a sword (not too unlike the Mother of the Motherland statue in its minute features) and a quotation of Ezekiel 34:14: “I will put my breath into you and you will live again.” Another public monument on Kyiv’s central street—Khreshatik (Кіршата)—marks the place of, and in names identifies, the baptism of Kyiv Rus in the Dnieper River, marking the state-sponsored birth of Christianity and the official grave of paganism. Ukrainian baptism by immersion refers once again to the death and rebirth of a nation.

Perhaps the most colorful national symbol is the Ukrainian nationalist emblem: an inverted triangle with black and red vertical halves, a white cross, and a green trident symbol encircled by black. The color black stands for Ukrainian soil (territory), the red symbolizes spilt Ukrainian blood, the white cross invokes Christian purity, and the green trident refers to Ukrainian mythology. In all, this symbol subtly portrays Ukrainian nationalistic identity: religion and farmland that have survived a bloody and noble history. While this formula of nationalism is largely contrived, it draws well from century-old national colors, red for life and black for death that is ubiquitous in Ukrainian folk art, fabric, and design.

The death and rebirth of Ukrainian national heroes contrasts distinctly with America’s national heroes. Shevchenko has achieved much more since death than in life. George
Washington, in contrast, remembered for living to make America free from Britain and for his role in participating in the birth of America, has earned the rightful title of forefather to his nation. In contrast, Ukraine has its Shevchenko, who glorifies the female whose bearing of life has often brought death. Instead of forefather, Shevchenko is the foreteller of his nation, silenced in life in all but script; doomed to be unable to bring about national independence, he imagined a Cossack historical heritage that would help Ukraine free itself from others and possess the whole of its bright future. While George Washington lived to free America, Shevchenko died foretelling Ukrainian rebirth.

Another social text, the national anthem, spells an interesting contrast: while the American national anthem emphasizes ever waving banners, freedom, and fighting, the Ukrainian national anthem "Няме вяр'я України" translates "Ukraine has not yet died," morbidly hinting that death has long been a serious concern and has yet to leave the nation's foreseeable horizon. The Polish national anthem similarly reads, "My żyjemy, my żyjemy, Polska nie zginęła" or "we live, we live, Poland has not perished!" As other testaments to how exile and foreign nationalities in tandem give birth to new nations, the Polish historical national anthem begins "oh, Lithuania," the Dutch national anthem begins with "all those of German blood," France's name comes from the Germanic tribe, the Franks, and lastly, the Ukrainian national anthem testifies to how all Ukrainian brothers are "of Cossack kin." Ukraine—like Europe—shares ancestors of foreign blood. Extending from Remi Brague's (2002) arguments on Europe, Ukraine could also benefit from a national identity willingly built on original sources outside of its current self. Ukrainian identity is found in its search—an unsettled national identity ensures that cultural stagnation and self-absorption will be washed away in a stream of change.

ON THE THEORY OF THE DEATH OF THE OTHER

Echoing its second theme, modern Ukrainian identity is currently transitioning from death in its past to its resurrected present. Given the prevalence of plural otherness as a defining factor in Ukrainian history and the continual reoccurrence of death and rebirth in modern Ukrainian culture, the Ukrainian nation will be able to overcome its identity crisis through a careful balance between national selfhood and otherness. G.W. F. Hegel offers a compelling account of the achievement of full personhood (which can be extended to include full nationhood) over the "other" through trial by death:

The individual [nation] who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person [Nation]; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. In the same way each must aim at the death of the other, as it risks its own life thereby; for that other is to it of no more worth than itself; the other's reality is presented to the former as an external other, as outside itself; it must view its otherness as pure existence for itself or as absolute negation. (1807, 233)

The key to this trial by death is consensus on what "self" means. Without consensus, the most likely and most dangerous misinterpretation of Hegel’s "the death of the other" leads us to internecine aggression against other nations, which unfortunately characterizes much of European history since Hegel. The secret to making this Hegelian formula
friendly is rejecting the label of “other” and not those labeled “other.” By defining collectives not in terms of what is “other” but by dismissing altogether the term “other,” a nation is congealed and created. Otherness must be embraced (or at least ignored) in policy and by polity if nontraditional persuasions are to survive on the national level.

World history would suggest that collectives tend to chafe at the suggestion of accepting nontraditional groups as one’s own, but as the poet Friedrich Hölderlin said, “Wo die Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch”—where danger is, there lies salvation. Undeniably, the question of what is Ukrainian will go unanswered until the question of “other” is resolved, or dismissed altogether.

What then is “other”? For any European collective identity, the “other” is its “outside self” and not “outside itself.” For Ukraine, the other cannot arguably be considered any one minority because it would be foolish not to recognize its own centuries of abuse that Ukrainians endured as minorities under other foreign rulers. In a strong sense, Ukraine is its other.

**Implications of a Modern Ukrainian National Identity**

Independent Ukraine has made a fresh start from its history of abuse and suppression. For example, most people within its borders welcome distancing Ukraine’s image from Soviet history. This may allow for a clean break from sticky national history, facilitating a more potent national reconstruction, a literal re-member-ing of Ukrainian memory.

On the whole, deliberately (re)envisioning national history in attempt to form a Ukrainian identity is not unique, nor is it necessarily wrong. In 1882 Ernest Renan stated: “Getting history wrong is part of being a nation” (1996, 52–54). The word “nation” itself derives from the Latin past participle of nasci, to be born. Thus quite literally, in reinventing history, every new nation is reborn as an imagined nation.

For Ukraine, to remember is to actualize the past in the present. Walter Benjamin helps explain how political stability and national memory—an invariably misinterpreted institutionalization of memories both kept and forgotten—are related and therefore necessary for establishing national movements. With the onset of World War II not long past, Benjamin (1968) pictured the present as a critical meeting of history where the future would fail if a missing history was not resurrected. Similarly, Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak argues that in fact Ukrainian history is as “normal” as any other national history (1996, 3). Because Ukraine is not unique in its history, it needs to treat carefully its divisive history. The value of history is an ongoing moral, even almost religious, task for the Ukrainian people—it should be kept out of reach of legislation, state-sponsorship, and arenas of factious national questions but well within reach of a public devoted to tolerating one another.

Ukrainian identity has not yet been unmade. In other words, Ukraine is still entangled in the political and religious histories with which it has been involved over the past centuries. Abstracting, instead of constructing, a national identity better describes the intellectual activity at hand because it needs to find itself among consensual principles and not among the divisive details and distinctions of its past. Consensus is the key to democracy, another ambition on the national agenda.
A few areas in the country seem to display such tolerance, giving hope to the whole. Odesa, the southern city with a cosmopolitan port and population ostensibly illustrates legislative tolerance toward its many minorities and forms an excellent example for the larger Ukrainian state. Public declarations are consistently bilingual and restrictions placed upon religious and ethnic groups are only on the basis of legal infraction and not on the basis of exclusive treatment. Odesa seems to embrace otherness, which is key to the success of Ukrainian state and nation. While groups united by similar characteristics (race, religion, and language, to name a few) retain power on the state level, the state itself should seriously consider going beyond blindness toward difference to the degree of seeking out and seizing opportunities to tolerate disparate groups within the nation.

Jewish and Gypsy minorities in Odesa are also excellent micro-examples of the sort of variegated, tolerant pluralism needed in Ukraine: Jews and Gypsies are Europe's two international minorities. Before 1948, neither had a homeland or a set 'nation' of its own; in addition, the two groups are historically antipodal to one another: while Jews have long integrated and dominated social capital across Ukraine (and all of the Western world), Gypsies generally have preferred close-knit communities separated from their host nations. Thus socially perpendicular, Jews and Gypsies have found at least one tolerant point of intersection in Odesa, which city houses its own Jew-Gypsy cemetery, another instance of a place of death as the Ukrainian medium for finding new hope for the future.

Differences, however, are not absolute or irreducible—they are occasions for understanding, not separation. The key to integration of a larger national identity into a state with many minorities is for no element of the nation to consider itself superior to others. Instead, as Professor Roman Szporluk writes that any dominant majority should "dissolve itself within or identify itself with a broader territorial, political, and or ideological concept as well. And so we have Americans, not 'WASPS'; Ottomans, not Turks; British, not English; Spaniards, not Castilians" (2001, 249). Thus we can have all Ukrainians, not merely Poles, Russians, Catholics, Orthodox, etc.

CONCLUSION ON THE CHERNOZEM (BLACK EARTH) OF HISTORY

A nation's history is a composition greater than the sum of its components, which can transform a nation from a historical graveyard into a garden of identities. Ukrainian history is in fact Ukrainian national identity's surest friend. Now, to succeed in its openly pro-European Union foreign policy, the Ukrainian state can foster a society whose ideals are based on tolerance of internal otherness, or a national identity in differences. In particular, Ukraine would do well to adopt a capability of Europeans, to accept one's preferred identity as secondary to a larger identity. As Remi Brague argues, this idea of voluntary secondarity to a greater source is originally Roman. In other words, the ability that Europeans have to think that they are Greek is actually Roman. The Romanity of Europe allows Europe to accept itself on the whole as secondary to its Greek origins. In the same light, Ukrainians can be European if they will accept their local identity as secondary to that of an all-embracing Ukrainian identity. Thus the success of democratization and nation-
building—Ukraine's two greatest political experiments—hinges on humility, or the recognition of self as secondary to a greater good.

Ukraine needs its pluralistic history and heritage to show that it was not always what it thinks it was; such an understanding will help it become more than what previous visions of its origins would allow. Ironically, without its traumatic history with its neighbors, Ukraine could never have become what it is today, heterogeneous and diverse. The ultimate reversal of Shevchenko's rue and rath against Muscovy and Poland, Ukraine's past plight under foreign rulers has lead Ukraine to this point where, given its embryonic statehood and inveterate historical pluralism, it must become one of the most progressive, tolerant nations in all of Eastern Europe to survive independently.

The coals of Ukrainian national history glow red under the ashes of time. As Emmanuel Levinas said, history is "truth [that] illuminates whoever breathes on its flame and coaxes it back to life. More or less. It's a question of breath. To admit the effect that literature [and all other national texts] has on men is perhaps the ultimate wisdom of the West in which the people . . . may recognize themselves" (1989, 266). Will history's heat and flame be used to burn the intruder's hand, or will the flame harmlessly traverse a nation, thawing the bitterness of a painful past? History is a question of breath. A controlled diaphragm can build a bonfire, while a careless breeze can set the whole territory ablaze. Only by finding their national image refracted and imperfect in the dissonance of their many historical texts, will Ukraine be reborn strong and supple. Ukraine lies in the world's richest soil, chernozem, or literally black earth, which history has made again to cultivate its perennial crop, Ukrainian national identity.

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Hailing from Iowa City, Iowa, husband of Kourtney Lambert, and father of Aaron, Ben Peters majored in Russian and International Studies with a minor in English. In the fall of 2004 he will pursue a master's degree in Russian area studies at Stanford or a Fulbright in Ukraine before entering the unemployable market. He is also considering pursuing a doctorate in comparative literature or politics. Feel free to e-mail the author directly at benhamir@hotmail.com.
1. A patriarchate is the geographic and spiritual center of an Orthodoxy church that houses a patriarch who rules over all other bishops. Since authority of church doctrine and political clout remain intertwined today, this concept of patriarchate will be useful for later discussion of conflicting national churches.

2. A similar word play, the Russian word for “country,” invokes its sister word for “strange.”

3. For another attempt of an outsider who tries to define Ukraine as a nation, see this essay. For an excellent and accessible treatment of the process of identity and otherness, see Honig 2001.

4. This term is borrowed from the author’s father, John Peters, who made the observation while visiting Mohyla Academy in summer 2003.

5. Incidentally, mohyla, or grave, is another of Shevchenko’s favorite words, appearing almost as often as its conceptual partner, chuzhii, or foreign. Also, Petro Mohyla’s innovative brand of Orthodoxy combined with the fighting Cossack counterculture to create in 1648, perhaps for the first time, a distinctly Ukrainian (non-Rus, non-Ruthenian) society.

6. The Divine Wisdom Cathedral is most commonly known in English as the mistranslation “Saint Sophia’s Cathedral.” However, the translation “divine wisdom” adheres more closely to the original meaning of the name of the building after which the Divine Wisdom Cathedral was patterned—the Hagia Sophia in Instanbul, Turkey. In fact Hagia Sophia is originally an Eastern Orthodox title for Jesus.

7. Literally a “Silencer” in Russian, which could also be rendered “jamming station” in English.

8. Considering Washington as America’s forefather, it is interesting to note that some interpret the Washington monument as a phallic symbol.

9. See Brague 2002 for more on the treatment of European identity and otherness.

10. As a young boy, the author created the word “remembertend,” a portmanteau of “remember” and “pretend,” that might work well for Ukraine in imagining anew a collective, consensual national identity.

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