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Issues of Modernity, Nation and Language and the Ukrainian Question in Russian Émigré Discourse During the Interwar Period[1]

Единство в многообразии,
дифференциация без дезинтеграции.
Unity in diversity,
Differentiation without disintegration.
(Petr Bitsilli)

It is thought that modernity brings humanity to a higher level of civilization. Indeed, the late modern age emerged in the late eighteenth century as the age of enlightenment and reason and was accompanied by industrial modernization, nation-building, secularization, and liberal thought. But there was another, gloomier, face of that modernity, one that facilitated imperialist expansion and cultural supremacy for those who sought to take advantage of the new economic and political order and adjusted more rapidly to the new civilizational endeavour (e.g., France, Great Britain, and the United States).[2] Apparently, this dual nature of modernity, as postmodern critics argue, while bringing the light of civilizational advancement, also brought either overt physical subjugation or latent cultural subversion, be it among native peoples of the Americas, the colonized peoples of Africa and Asia, or their Slavic brothers. However, while in many cases colonizers sought to civilize the social and cultural spheres of remote, backward areas, what motivated autocratic Russia's presence in Ukraine at the beginning of the twentieth century, and how could Russia justify its efforts to continue exercising its imperialistic authority over its Slavic neighbor, with its historic tradition of democratic institutions and significant cultural achievements which throughout much of Ukraine's history had nourished Russian culture? This was an idea of modernity as an ongoing rationalized movement toward global

[1] This paper is based on a presentation delivered at the Canadian Association of Slavists annual conference at Concordia University, Montreal, 28 May 2010.

[2] For more details, see Paul R. Brass, 'Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Identity Formation', in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), 85–90.

ASEES, Vol. 25, Nos. 1–2 (2011): 61–77.

progress with the promise of common happiness and prosperity, an idea that was actively discussed among Russian émigrés in interwar Europe, who were torn between the challenges of modernity and the inertia of imperialist thinking in their pursuit to re-evaluate the role of the Russian nation and identity at a new historical stage. Such happiness and prosperity, however, would be achieved at the cost of the marginalization, or even loss, of Ukrainian identity, culture, and language, which were, in fact, officially recognized and promoted by the new Soviet state in the 1920s during the period of so-called indigenization of national cultures in the national republics of the USSR. The following article addresses this question, with particular reference to the views of two prominent Russian philologists, Petr Bitsilli and Nikolai Trubetskoi, and also deconstructs the (post)imperialist mechanisms that were behind the sophisticated rhetoric used to perpetuate imperial and colonial structures.

The essence of the Ukrainian question – which had already been discussed before the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 – was whether to recognize the Ukrainian nation as a nation separate from the Russian, or all-Russian, nation, and whether the Ukrainian language was a separate Slavic language or a Russian dialect. Most Russian émigré intellectuals followed the established imperialistic concept of one Russian nation consisting of three East Slavic 'tribes': Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. But while rightist and monarchist circles (e.g., Struve, Volkonskii) were firm in their denial of the Ukrainian nation, Russian émigré liberals and democrats (Miliukov, Vishniak, Odinets, Bitsilli) were not unfriendly to the trends of their day, and they tried to adjust Russian ideological and political views to modern challenges.[3] Among the most progressive was a modernist narrative of nation as a social and cultural construct, championed by Pavel Miliukov in his groundbreaking work *Natsional'nyi vopros* (The National Question) (1925).[4]

[3] For a detailed discussion, see my article 'On the Other Side: The Russian–Ukrainian Encounter in Displacement, 1920–1939', *Nationalities Papers* 37, 3 (2009): 327–48.

[4] In his book, Miliukov, a former prime minister in the tsarist government and the editor-in-chief of the émigré daily newspaper, *Poslednie novosti*, surveyed three concepts of nation: cosmopolitan, nationalist, and 'internationalist'. The cosmopolitan one (as advocated by Petr Lavrov and Petr Tkachev) is based on the idea of intellectual progress and seeks to eliminate national uniqueness (11–12). The nationalist concept, divided between its 'neutral' and 'chauvinistic' forms, flowed from the primordialist ('metaphysical') notion of nation as a 'mystic being' (Struve) and 'rationally incomprehensible' (Berdiaev) (14–15). The 'internationalist' seeks to synthesize the former two notions, prioritizing the concept of class, not nation (21–22). Miliukov identifies his own approach as evolutional and sociological, which considers the nation as an 'unfinished product', always in the

Since the Ukrainian question was at the core of this re-evaluation process, many Russian émigrés applied Ukraine's case to their exploration of the issue of the Russian (post)imperial nation and identity. Especially active in the 1920s–1930s was Petr Bitsilli, a historian and linguist, who published his works in the Russian émigré press, including *Sovremennye zapiski*, *Zveno*, and *Chisla*. His most important works, 'Natsiia i narod' (Nation and Ethnos) (1928), 'Natsiia i gosudarstvo' (Nation and State) (1929), 'Natsiia i iazyk' (Nation and Language) (1929), and 'K ponimaniiu sovremennoi kul′tury' (Understanding Modern Culture) (1932) were published in *Sovremennye zapiski*, arguably the most influential journal of Russian émigré thought of the period.[5] He focused more specifically on the Ukrainian question in his work *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii* (The Problem of Russian–Ukrainian Relations in the Light of History) which was published in book form (Prague, 1930). The son of Italian immigrants, Bitsilli grew up in southern Ukraine. In emigration, he closely observed Russian–Ukrainian relations, and many of his works were a response to the short-lived policy of Ukrainization in the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s. In trying to be impartial, this scholar was, nevertheless, quite controversial in applying his vision of a modern nation, and thus his views serve as an example of the complexity of post-imperial transformation.

Bitsilli's general modern attitude to the concept of nation is clear from a number of his works. In his article 'Natsiia i iazyk', he writes about the changing nature of a nation: 'Ethnic groups are in constant change, their lives are full of continuous deaths and births; ethnic groups merge with each other, giving birth to new groups, which, in turn, are differentiated into new nations'.[6] Denouncing the purely ethnic/primordial narrative of nation, the scholar views it, first and foremost, as a 'cultural union'.[7] His understanding of culture has a two-tiered structure: a common level, which is common to all humankind and is depersonified, and a top level, which constitutes an 'absolute value of cultural practice and

process of formation and whose characteristics are conditional. Speaking about the process of self-identification of nations in the former Russian Empire, Miliukov accepts it positively unless it evolves into aggressive forms (e.g., a struggle against the state or rejection of universal values).

[5] His most important works were recently reprinted in Russia. See Petr Bitsilli, *Izbrannye trudy po filologii* (Moscow: Nasledie, 1996).

[6] Petr Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', *Izbrannye trudy po filologii*, 92–93.

[7] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 79.

its results'.[8] This top level is seen as elitist because it is represented by prominent figures and geniuses, who create unique universal values that may be shared with other nations and which contribute to world progress. The common level exists for domestic consumption, to nourish this top level.

How is this classification relevant to the Russian–Ukrainian case? Using the term 'regionalism', Bitsilli considers Ukraine a region of Russia and positions it on the common level as a regional culture. Presenting the other, 'colonized', as marginalized or backward is a typical mechanism of the imperial discourse.[9] In his attack on the process of nations' self-determination, Bitsilli also wields the term 'regionalism'. This term was already widely used in the Russian imperial discourse and was very convenient for coopting rebellious territories of the empire as its own so as not to define them in national terms.[10] Allying regionalism with local specificities of everyday life and economy, Bitsilli identifies the Croatian and Ukrainian movements as regional, not national, ones.[11] However, he points out that regionalism and nationalism are frequently intermingled, as it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.[12] He admits that a regional movement may develop into a national movement, as exemplified by the United States' rupture with the British Crown.

Bitsilli, to be sure, recognizes the achievements of the Ukrainian people but only as contributions to all-Russian culture (e.g., Gogol′): 'Ukraine contributed to the history of humankind as a part of Russia. Russian culture and Russian statehood have been created to a great extent by Ukrainians'.[13] The view that Ukraine was an equal part or even a champion in this relationship was promoted by another prominent Russian émigré Nikolai Trubetskoi. In his letter of 19 September 1926 to the well-known linguist, Roman Jakobson, he wrote about

[8] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 79.

[9] See, for example, Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

[10] Maksim Gorkii, who was lauded as the most consistent 'fighter for the freedom of the human spirit' in pre-revolutionary Russia, said: 'In speaking of Russia as a whole, one should not forget that it was built by the three tribes together and that they constitute its real skeleton, tightly overgrown with the muscles of other tribes; one has always to take care persistently that this stem retains its "chemical unity" so that all its good and useful characteristics develop quickly and successfully, and then the muscles will knit with it more tightly' (13). These words were written as a questionnaire response to the Moscow-based journal *Ukrainskaia zhizn′* (1912), which was edited by Symon Petliura.

[11] Petr Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii* (Prague: Edinstvo, 1930), 31.

[12] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 31–32.

[13] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 16–17.

the crucial influence of Ukrainian culture on Russian culture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: '… Russian literature after the period of Peter the Great's rule is a natural continuity of Western Russian (mostly Kyivan) literature, not Great Russian (Moscow)'. Moreover, he even tries to present contemporary Russian culture as originating predominantly from Ukraine: 'Actually, we can speak about the "Ukrainization" of the entire spiritual culture of Great Russia at the turn of the eighteenth century. That Russian culture, which true Ukrainians want to present as foreign and forcefully imposed on them, is, in fact, Ukrainian in its origin'.[14] There are two problems with this approach, no matter how alluring it may be. First, it refers to the past and belittles the current process of the Ukrainian revival. Second, it does not accept Ukrainian heritage as something different and unique, and includes it in the Russian political and cultural continuum from the period of Kyivan Rus′.

But what if Ukrainians could create their own high culture and nation-state? Certainly, the modernist Bitsilli does not deny such a possibility. Moreover, he admits that there are serious grounds for this transformation: 'Forty million people speaking the same language is, no doubt, a reliable basis for the creation of a great nation in the future. Ukraine can develop economically, politically and culturally without the Russian Empire and all-Russian culture. This prospect is so enticing that it would be a crime not to try to accomplish it'.[15] Yes, that is so, but then, exploiting the modernist card, he invalidates this statement with his next argument: Ukraine and the world would lose more than they would achieve. 'Small ships naturally look for shallow water', the scholar declares.[16]

To understand Bitsilli's position in the new historical circumstances, one should look at him as a consistent modernist with a firm belief in ideas of rationalism and global progress. He sees the historical process as one that is 'inevitably being rationalized', asserting that the 'development of history is more and more dependant on our will directed by intelligence'.[17] And while he does not strictly oppose the self-determination of nations ('it is a sign of the times'),

[14] Roman Jakobson, ed., *N. S. Trubetzkoy's Letters and Notes* (The Hague; Paris: Mouton, 1975), 92. For a detailed discussion of the Ukrainian contribution to Russian culture, see David Saunders, *The Ukrainian Impact on Russian Culture, 1750–1850* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1985).

[15] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 16.

[16] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 38.

[17] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 16.

he questions such a trend by adopting a utilitarian approach: 'How would the growth of a number of nations enrich history?'[18] Although he is cautious with regard to Hegel's division of the world into historic and non-historic nations, Bitsilli recognizes 'the fact of the unequal value of nations' and singles out 'old, historic nations' with their established cultures: 'That which has been created by old nations for centuries, leveled by generations and accumulated through the efforts, errors, and achievements of millions of people as their national tradition, "new" nations have to "create" at once. But how can one create a tradition that would require long-term, natural growth?'[19] Within this structuralist paradigm of common and top levels, he applies these 'new' cultures to the common level. They have been living a 'spontaneous, semi-conscious, and routine life that was set apart from the universal life of civilized humankind' and thus have not developed such a tradition.[20] Here he ignores his own statement on the Ukrainian contribution to all-Russian culture and, instead, points to the provincialism of nineteenth-century Ukrainian life, which was conditioned by long-lasting imperialist pressure.

To develop his argument, Bitsilli uses very sophisticated modern rhetoric, often with dichotomic opposition, such as culture versus civilization, the eternal versus the transient, the creative process as an end in itself (*samotsel′*), culture versus politics, the universal and the local, and depersonification (*obezlichivanie*). Culture, in his opinion, is the foundation of every nation. But his understanding of culture is quite perplexing and, in many respects, determined by his imperialist position. The scholar proposes that culture not be divided into the material and spiritual but into 'absolute value' and 'public usefulness' (*obshchestvennaia poleznost′*).[21] Absolute cultural values are unique to nations, and their high quality is almost taken for granted. They can be produced only by developed nations that can enrich the world. In his texts he refers to the authoritative voices of prominent historical figures, including Luther, Shakespeare, Hugo, and Hegel, as well as the Russians Pushkin, Gogol′, Nekrasov, Tolstoi, and Dostoevskii,

[18] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 20.

[19] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 29.

[20] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 28–29.

[21] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 79.

who 'exist outside of historical time'.[22] This type of rational categorization with Hegelian overtones, was, in fact, aimed at strengthening his imperialist position.

Bitsilli's main concern in the creation of new nations is depersonification, which is, as mentioned earlier, represented by the common level of culture. Utilizing current modern terms, he refers to new nations as importers of 'culture produced *en série*, because they [new nations] were created in that way too; they are being produced *en série*, fitting a certain standard'.[23] For him, new nations 'become more and more alike'.[24] He does not specify, however, in what sense and to what degree they are alike: do they have the same political system, economic infrastructure, or cultural achievements? If so, is that not good? Is this not the global progress that he advocates and which breaks down borders and makes these nations similar? Bitsilli's statements are contradictory and, in many respects, he overlooks the national will of 'new' nations and the originality of their cultures, treating them as artificial entities. But even if new nations have not yet developed high cultures, does this mean that they prefer to be loyal to empires, or do they aspire to create such cultures? The scholar clearly did not take into account the powerful appeal and irrational nature of nationalism.

According to his cultural vision of the concept of nation, Bitsilli disregards the political component by simply labelling it as politicization. For him the process of nation-creating is highly politicized, as it is based not on the natural way of cultural formation but on the artificial intentions of politicians to create a new polity as an end in itself. 'The tragedy of a statesman building a nation as an end in itself is that he treats culture like politics, and that is why he is able to create a likeness (*podobie*) of a nation but not a real nation. He is a craftsman, not a creator… The purpose of craft is to make a useful thing. The purpose of art is to connect its creator with those exposed to his art through his work'.[25] This metaphorical comparison explains little, but tends to single out the defective nature of new national polities by conjuring up an association of the oppositions between 'high and low culture' and 'historic and non-historic nations'. Bitsilli was certainly well aware that the Russian Empire was a political entity that had been built on the permanent absorption of other polities, and which

[22] Petr Bitsilli, 'Tragediia russkoi kultury', in *Izbrannye trudy po filologii*, 155.

[23] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 28.

[24] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 27.

[25] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 24.

imposed its dominant culture. But now that he was facing the prospect of the dissolution of that empire, he tried to disregard the factor that once served well in its construction.

To support his argument, Bitsilli employs another controversial dichotomy: academism versus creativity. Defining academism as the rupture of substance and form in the theory of art, he places new nations in this category. This would mean that they are created according to already established models, not spontaneously, like old nations: 'An academician, who only wants to be like everyone, would depersonalize his material… A politician, whose activity is imbued with this sort of academism, would inevitably lead to the depersonification of that national entity with which he is dealing with and, ultimately, to the death of a nation'.[26] The new nation, Bitsilli argues, would lack an important feature of the creative process – distinctiveness. But would new nations be more distinctive within centralized imperial structures? It would certainly bring about, as the scholar stated above, the marginalization of this local/regional culture and nourish the imperial discourse with its high language and related topics. At the same time, he treats manifestations of distinctiveness as 'chasing after the highest distinctiveness'. Here we come to a totally contradictory point in Bitsilli's arguments: in the creation of new nations he sees close similarity, but then he denigrates their distinctiveness.

Although nation building was a visible phenomenon in the late modern period, Bitsilli was more opposed to this process because it threatened all-Russian integrity and seemed unnatural and illogical. He sees the 'division of the Russian nation' as forced both by the Bolsheviks and the Ukrainizers. For the Bolsheviks, it is a 'bone' thrown to regions to obtain their support,[27] whereas for Ukrainians it is the only way to implant Ukrainian culture, as it would inevitably lose to Russian culture under the condition of 'free competition'.[28] The 'theory of the struggle of two cultures', which was advanced in 1923 by one of the pro-Russian communist leaders in Ukraine, Dmytro Lebid′, was at the core of intense debates at the time.[29] Associating Russian culture with the city and the progressive working class, and Ukrainian culture with the village and backward peasants, Lebid′ argued that the

[26] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 26.

[27] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 35.

[28] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 36.

[29] Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 537–8.

former would eventually take over, as it represented the more progressive forces of the modern period. Represented from the Marxist point of view, this theory coalesced well with the dominant capitalist predisposition toward rationalism and global progress.

What was the role of language in the modern conceptualization of a nation? From the contemporary perspective, language is considered an important but not the sole feature of a nation. We know many multilingual nation-states united on political grounds (e.g., Canada, Switzerland, Finland). Although Bitsilli does not deny it, he generally absolutizes the role of language, as he views the nation above all as a culture, and language as its only static component. 'Ethnic groups change their institutions, morals and customs, and even religion and country, but not their language. Out of all the "national traditions" that are "sacred" to the people, the language tradition is the only one that resists time and, furthermore, is strengthened by time'.[30] In his view, nation disappears as soon as language is dead – a primordial notion that contradicts his own argument about the dynamic nature of language.[31] But Bitsilli utilizes this method only when it supports his imperialist position. It is a different thing when he speaks about the Ukrainian language: 'Language is the "soul" of a nation… Let us assume that the Ukrainian people will master the Russian (i.e., all-Russian) language voluntarily and automatically. They will not be "depersonified" but will become one whole with the Russian people and "commune with the souls" of Pushkin and Tolstoy, as Gogol′ did who, in turn, significantly enriched the "Russian soul" '.[32] Thus, for Bitsilli the marginalization and loss of the Ukrainian language would not spell the death of the Ukrainian nation or its 'depersonification' but, euphemistically, 'communion with the souls'. Gogol′, whose father wrote in Ukrainian, appears to be an ideal example of this imperialistic appropriation.

Ethnic groups do not voluntarily repudiate their native languages. There were definitely acts of coercion within the imperial framework. In the Ukrainian case, these were Peter I's ban on the publication of old Ukrainian books (1720), the Valuev edict (1863), and the Ems ukase (1876), which either did not recognize the language at all ('не было, нет и быть не может') or restricted its use. Although

[30] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 81–82.

[31] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 83, 93.

[32] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 93.

Bitsilli recognizes the criminal nature of any violence perpetrated by one nation against another, he prefers not to dig in the past and admits that 'it is also insane to place obstacles to the *free assimilation* [sic] of people'.[33] All former unjustices, therefore, could be justified by the greater purpose of global progress – a perfectly modern approach.

For Bitsilli, recognizing language as the main characteristic of the nation could have served as a serious argument to recognize the Ukrainian nation. Moreover, the Russian Academy of Sciences recognized the Ukrainian language as a separate Slavic language in 1903. Instead, he develops the dichotomy of language/dialect, which would correspond roughly to the nation/ethnic group. Here he tries to avoid a purely linguistic conceptualization of the categories of 'language' and 'dialect' and adopt the political approach, which he denounces in his culturalist concept of nation. What is language, he asks, and then goes on to acknowledge the arbitrariness of the difference between language and dialect, which may depend on political circumstances and the historical process. He believes, e.g., that, from the morphological point of view, the Dutch language is a dialect of German. But it is considered a language because the nation that speaks this 'dialect' separated long ago from common German life and had its own state and culture.[34] At the same time Bitsilli considers the Ukrainian language a dialect of the Russian language, which, however, may develop into a separate language if the Ukrainian people decide to separate politically from Russia. But from the modern perspective, as mentioned above, this would be an unwelcome act that will push the Ukrainian nation backwards and hinder global progress.

Bitsilli's understanding of the dichotomy of language/dialect largely corresponds to his division of culture into top and common levels. On top is the 'exemplary and stable classical' language, created on the basis of literature or, metaphorically speaking, a 'dead language', which is not spoken by ordinary people in everyday life.[35] All other forms of a language are its dialects, and they constitute the 'living' language, which can be classified in two subgroups: local dialects (*местные говоры*) and class dialects (social dialects, argot). Since all classes and regions of a society constitute a nation, all its dialects serve as the

[33] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 93.

[34] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 6.

[35] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 83.

source of one national language: 'All dialects, including "regional" and "class", as well as "age" ("children's language") and gender dialects… constitutes one "potential" national language that secures the eternal life of the "dead" literary language'.[36] The problem with this view is that Bitsilli places both local and social 'dialects' on one hierarchical level, which for him constitutes one national language. This is in fact a convenient tool for an imperialist who is reluctant to identify key differences among 'local' dialects. Moreover, associating them with backwardness implies their unsuitability to the process of modernization.

Opposed to his well-structured approach is a trend that Bitsilli calls 'democratic and romantic naturalism', whose proponents seek to emancipate ordinary people and, thus, develop its 'oppressed' dialect into a language. He derides this approach, inasmuch as dialects are all full of 'casual and abnormal features', the result of 'provincial or caste existing'.[37] The scholar goes so far as to question the necessity of having names of the months in the Czech, Ukrainian, Croatian, and Polish languages, which are all derived from the folk tradition and reflecting their 'poetical views'; whereas the rest of the world uses Latin names.[38] He also cannot accept the fact that the Croats use their own words *ravnatel*, *sveuchilishte*, and *knizhnitsa* instead of the internationally more recognizable *director*, *universitet*, and *biblioteka*. 'To prove that their language is so rich that everything can be conveyed in it', he declares sarcastically.[39] Bitsilli would even be willing to cleanse the Russian language of words that are reminiscent of Russian folklore and use the word *aeroplan*, e.g., instead of *samolet*.[40] Certainly, this linguistic vision was informed by his modern stance whereby he would sacrifice national traditions (which, he insisted, were required to build high culture) for the sake of global progress and world-wide uniformity. Even in linguistic terms, the rejection of certain words would impoverish the language, while their use would enrich its stylistic and metaphorical potential. This linguistic sorting, in fact, was instrumental in Soviet cultural policies, which were aimed at adjusting national

[36] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 88.

[37] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 89.

[38] Petr Bitsilli, 'K ponimaniiu sovremennoi kul′tury (Problema universal′nogo iazyka)', *Sovremennye zapiski* 49 (1932), 326.

[39] Bitsilli, 'K ponimaniiu sovremennoi kul′tury', 326.

[40] Actually, in the contemporary Russian language *samolet* is in active use, while *aeroplan* sounds more archaic and is associated with the period of modernization in the USSR in the 1920s–1930s.

languages to Russian standards. As a result, words with close pronunciation to the Russian language were preferred, while those that differed were marginalized or even eradicated, not to mention the ban on the letter *r* (hard g) in Ukrainian or transfer to the Cyrillic alphabet in many 'Soviet' languages.

In attempts to revive a language Bitsilli sees pure dogmatism.[41] Even if a language once flourished, should it be revived now that it has declined and become provincial? He acknowledges historical injustices that were committed with regard to certain ethnic groups and their languages. But he treats this assimilating and globalizing process as a positive event from the modern perspective. For him, the 'historical process is the process of the formation – and corruption – of different kinds of groups, nations, empires, and religious, economic, and other entities'.[42] However, he fails to explain why the tsarist government had constantly oppressed the Ukrainian 'dialect'.

Bitsilli's linguistic chauvinism is also clearly seen in his solidarity with Maxim Gorkii's protest against the translation of his novel *Mat'* (Mother) into Ukrainian.[43] Gorkii considered that there was no need to translate it into the 'Ukrainian dialect', as all Ukrainians would understand it perfectly without a translation. Bitsilli calls this need for translation a 'conscious self-deception' and 'conscious hypocrisy', which is not even justified by expediency: 'It is ridiculous to be afraid of the similarity of languages, as this similarity cannot be an argument in support of either side. A Bulgarian easily understands Russian books, and a Russian understands Bulgarian ones. French people do not need to study Italian in order to read Petrarch in the original'.[44] There is certainly a great deal of naïvety in this argument that related languages would be easily understood by readers. The problem here is that he treats translation as a political act rather than a literary or aesthetic one. Translation has also been considered as a creative process that advances the language potential and creates a new aesthetic reality, as well as an act of friendship. However, for Gorkii and Bitsilli, it was only a politically harmful act aimed at undermining imperial, all-Russian unity.

[41] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 85.

[42] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 9.

[43] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 7. For more details on Gorkii's attitude to the Ukrainian language and culture, see my article, 'The Russian-Ukrainian Encounter: Gorky Versus Vynnychenko', *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, 16 (2006): http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/16/index16.shtml (accessed 20 February 2012).

[44] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 7.

Cloaking themselves in modern rhetoric, they claim that it only divides people: ' "Good" Ukrainians now have to pretend as though they do not understand the Russian language'.[45] Would this global unification really facilitate the global progress and the development of certain ethnic groups?

In his discussion Bitsilli often refers to the notion of creative geniuses who have the capacity to develop dialects into national languages: '… [T]he richness of a language does not depend on the size of a nation's population, the carrier of the dialect, but on the level of its civilization, i.e., how rich was the life of this nation or, in other words, how many geniuses it had'.[46] He singles out a number of famous men of letters, including Dante, Luther, and Proust, as well as the 'great, free, and powerful' language of Russian writers, such as Turgenev, Pushkin, and Dostoevskii. Postmodernist critics deconstruct this approach as author-centred, which was brought to life by the modern drive for individualism and is seen as 'the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology'.[47] 'The text', as Roland Barthes puts it, 'is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture', and the author's 'only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them'.[48]

Anthony Smith considers the construction of geniuses, along with heroes, prophets and messiahs, as an important factor in strengthening the nation as a sacred communion.[49] He notes, in particular, the efforts of Russian Slavophiles and writers, such as Tiutchev and Dostoevskii (*The Possessed*), as well as the composer Mussorgskii (*Khovanshchina* and *Boris Godunov*) to develop 'the idea of Russia's superiority over the West'.[50] This imperialistic supremacy is seen in Bitsilli's description of the modern Ukrainian language as an artificial one without geniuses: 'The trouble is not that they, facilitating progress, create the Ukrainian literary language "artificially" – that is how Dante, Luther, and Lomonosov did (and all creativity is "artificial"). The trouble is that they do what Dante, Luther, and Lomonosov did, not being themselves Dantes, Luthers, and Lomonosovs.

[45] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 7.

[46] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 91.

[47] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in David Lodge, ed., *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London and New York: Longman, 1991), 168.

[48] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', 170.

[49] Anthony Smith, *Chosen People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 41.

[50] Smith, *Chosen People*, 187.

And this is what predetermines the Ukrainian language question: for a long time, if not forever, they condemn it for existing as a "second-rate", if not worse, language'.[51] Some Russian writers and intellectuals might place Taras Shevchenko, the greatest Ukrainian poet and national symbol, in this pantheon of geniuses, although some would rather see him as a 'Russian bard'.[52] Bitsilli recognizes the Shevchenko cult embodied in his portraits that hang in Ukrainian homes. They are decorated with embroidered towels depicting a girl and a boy dancing the Hopak, which he calls 'quasi-traditionalism'.[53] But he says nothing about Shevchenko's immense influence on the formation of the modern Ukrainian nation and culture.

In the final analysis, all these debates on the issues of modernity, nation, and language were not simply the theoretical reflections of exiled Russian émigrés, but also an immediate, practical response to the process of indigenization introduced by the Soviet government in the 1920s. At one point Bitsilli recognizes the Ukrainian literary language as a 'fait accompli'.[54] But, then he warns against Ukrainization because it does not further global progress. The consistent state support and revival of the Ukrainian language and culture in the Ukrainian SSR was treated in Russian émigré circles as 'forced Ukrainization'.[55] That is why Bitsilli advises that it would be better to repudiate this type of culture, as 'the Ukrainian culture cannot be introduced forcibly'.[56] He assumes that the Ukrainian people, if offered an option, would prefer the highly developed Russian culture. A lesser evil for all-Russian unity, in his opinion, would be 'freely developed local Ukrainian culture'.[57] Although he does not explain the difference between free and unfree Ukrainian cultures, one would assume that he was implying a regional type of culture for local consumption as being more acceptable to the empire than a fully-fledged modern Ukrainian culture, which would constantly threaten the imperial order.

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[51] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 90.

[52] For instance, the main hero in Ivan Bunin's novel *Zhizn' Arsen'eva* (1927–33) nostalgically describes Shevchenko as a poet of genius (350). The poet Sergei Rafal′skii used an excerpt from a poem by Shevchenko as an epigraph to his poem 'Idilii' (73).

[53] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 29–30.

[54] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 90.

[55] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 92.

[56] Bitsilli, 'Natsiia i iazyk', 92.

[57] Bitsilli, *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnoshenii v svete istorii*, 37.

Nikolai Trubetskoi's views were also a response to the policy of Ukrainization, albeit from a more conservative standpoint. An adherent of the Eurasian movement, he shared the positions of its leaders, such as Petr Savitskii and Nikolai Ustrialov, with regard to the restoration of imperial structures in a new, Eurasian, guise. In his article, 'K ukrainskoi probleme' (On the Ukrainian Question) (1927) he does not refer directly to modernity or global progress, but it may be inferred from the logic of his argumentation, which is similar to Bitsilli's. Trubetskoi also speaks about two levels of all-Russian culture and is convinced that the Ukrainian intelligentsia would prefer the top one, whereas 'independent Ukrainian culture, deprived of the support of this most valuable segment of the Ukrainian people, will be doomed to degeneration and death'.[58] The scholar argues that Ukrainian culture cannot create its own 'top level', as every artist and writer aspires to a larger audience, i.e., an all-Russian audience.[59] Among the limitations of this scheme there could be (1) low-brow authors who are afraid of genuine competition and (2) politicization of the issue. However, this type of culture, in his opinion, will be 'imbued with petty provincial vanity, exultant mediocrity, banality, obscurantism… and hatred of everything Russian… even at the cost of falsehood, slander, [and] rejection of its own historical past and of spurning its national sacred heritage'.[60] Trubetskoi, like Bitsilli, considers Ukrainization as an end in itself and as embezzlement of energy by 'maniacal zealots of cultural separatism'.[61]

Overall, the Russian émigré intelligentsia in interwar Europe failed to overcome the (post)imperial syndrome of recognizing the sovereignty and civilizational value of the former constituent parts of the Russian Empire. Although they were armed with new, modern concepts of a nation as an 'evolutional and sociological' construct (Miliukov) or 'cultural union' (Bitsilli), their rhetoric implied the status quo for the basic imperial structures (i.e., polity, culture, language).

[58] Nikolai Trubetskoi, 'K ukrainskoi probleme', in N. Tolstoi, ed., *Russkii uzel evraziistva* (Moscow: Belovodie, 1997), 127.

[59] Trubetskoi, 'K ukrainskoi probleme', 128.

[60] Trubetskoi, 'K ukrainskoi probleme', 129.

[61] Trubetskoi, 'K ukrainskoi probleme', 136. For more details on the role of Ukrainian high culture in undermining Russia's imperialistic aspirations and on the criticism of Trubetskoi's approach, see Oleh Ilnytzkyj, 'Modelling Culture in the Empire: Ukrainian Modernism and the Death of the All-Russian Idea', in Andreas Kappeler, Zenon E. Kohut, Frank E. Sysyn, and Mark von Hagen, eds., *Culture, Nation and Identity: The Ukrainian–Russian Encounter, 1600–1945* (Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2003), 298–324.

Paradoxically, modernity served their purpose of justifying former injustices by promising a better future through engagement in the rational movement toward global progress and neglecting the unique features of marginalized and 'non-historic' national groups. Even if modernity facilitated the formation of new nations in some aspects, Russian émigrés would question it with controversial rhetoric by viewing, e.g., their distinctiveness as sameness or their unique cultures as provincialism. Bitsilli's and Trubetskoi's analyses of Ukrainian culture and language as slowing down this progress are a good example of this attitude.

The idea of modernity, which implicitly promoted imperialism, was, in fact, a factor that united communists in the Soviet Union with their Russian émigré opponents, who hailed the turn toward Russian chauvinism initiated by Stalin in the 1930s in an attempt to preserve Russian imperial structures. Communism became a new ghost in the wheel of history and was seen by Marxists as the ultimate stage in the development of human civilization, leading to a modernized society of universal happiness, brotherhood, and prosperity. In his letter to Lazar Kaganovich and other members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (Bolshevik), dated 26 April 1926, Stalin dismissed the national aspirations of Ukrainians, referring, in particular, to the leading role of Moscow as a 'citadel of the international revolutionary movement' and to the Western European proletarians, who 'look with admiration at the flag that flies over Moscow'.[62] The idea of proletarian internationalism was, however, quickly dismissed and replaced with a new concept of the 'elder brother', the Russian people, who would lead the 'younger brothers' (referring to all the national republics of the USSR) toward a brighter future without alternatives.[63] Interestingly, this modernist framework on the national question informed views of some Western scholars who, facing changes after the collapse of the Soviet empire, attributed the nationalism of the newly created states to anti-modern trends.[64]

[62] J. V. Stalin, *Works, January–November 1926* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), vol. 8, 161.

[63] For more details, see Serhy Yekelchyk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian–Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2004.)

[64] Eric Hobsbawm has written in this regard: 'The characteristic nationalist movements of the late twentieth century are essentially negative, or rather divisive. Hence the insistence on "ethnicity" and linguistic differences, each or both sometimes combined with religion. In one sense they may be regarded as the successors to, sometimes the heirs of, the small-nationality movements directed against the Habsburg, Tsarist and Ottoman empires, that is to say against what were considered historically obsolete modes of political organization, in the name of a (perhaps misconceived) model of political

As a matter of fact, by the late 1920s Ukrainian society had fulfilled certain objectives, which, according to Bitsilli and Trubetskoi, were unattainable, in particular, developing high culture and the Ukrainian language. Ukraine's rapid cultural advancement, along with daring attempts to establish political sovereignty within the Soviet framework (best revealed in Mykola Khvylovy's slogan 'Away from Moscow!') was considered a serious threat to Russia's centralization of power and resulted in the mass persecution of the Ukrainian political and cultural elite, priests, and peasantry, recognized today by many as genocide.

modernity, the nation-state. In another sense most of them are quite the opposite, namely rejections of modern modes of political organization, both national and supranational. Time and again they seem to be reactions of weakness and fear, attempts to erect barricades to keep at bay the forces of the modern world…' ('Ethnic Nationalism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Ethnicity*, 355–56).