

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES AND THE MAKING OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POST-SOVIET UKRAINE

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It's the direction given by education
that is likely to determine
all that follows.
Plato, *The Republic*

Schools are vitally important in the transmission and dissemination of historical memories, myths, and symbols, all of which foster a sense of nation-ness. The cultural knowledge schools transmit is a critical factor in formulating identity and crystallizing membership in a particular generation. By targeting education for reform, political leaders capitalize on the potential to incorporate into the very experience and memory of the first post-Soviet generation elements of Ukrainian culture, language, and historical memory to naturalize a Ukrainian identity among children of Russian-speaking families.

As Ernest Gellner (1983) and others have pointed out, the structural requirements of a modern industrial economy mandate that workers be mobile and capable of communicating in impersonal situations by trading on common cultural capital to be understood. Schools have become the arena where one learns the cultural currency in the form of skills and sensibilities that makes such communication possible. The culture in which one has been taught to communicate indelible patterns of thinking and becomes the core of one's identity. Hence, Gellner argues that in the age of nation-state, one's prime loyalty is not to a religion, monarch, or land, but to the medium of one's literacy, the identity-conferring part of education, and its political protector. "The monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence," he asserts (1983:34). Increasingly, a cultural group is unlikely to reproduce and sustain itself if it does not have its own independent educational system institutionalizing aspects of its culture, delineating cultural boundaries, and providing an institutional site for acculturation to its values. The leaders of the beleaguered new Ukrainian state are looking to the educational system

to unify a highly diverse and disaffected population. A vast state-sponsored effort to Ukrainianize public education reveals the state's version of what it means to be Ukrainian in post-Soviet society. Redefining an inclusivist Ukrainian nation, encompassing the sizable Russian and Russified Ukrainian populations, is crucial for the viability of a weak Ukrainian state.

Concerned about the fragility of the new Ukrainian state, a small group of Ukrainian educators scattered across the country have joined state-sponsored efforts at nation-building by creating elite schools. An independent Ukrainian state is best secured, they reason, by a strong, culturally unified nation and a nation cannot exist without a cultural elite. The founders and faculty of these schools see their mission as the reestablishment of a Ukrainian national elite and a reintroduction of the societal divisions based on national, religious, class and gender distinctions that the Soviet system, in an effort to forge a supraethnic Soviet identity, sought to erase. This essay focuses on the nationalizing factors that distinguish elite schools from Soviet schools, whose legacy they fight against, and the practices that set elite schools apart from the majority of public schools in post-Soviet Ukraine.

I must note at the onset that these elite schools are fledgling enterprises with small student bodies. They are perpetually on the brink of bankruptcy as they search for sponsors to supplement the minimal state funding they receive to expand the very offerings that make their schools elite. Their numbers alone do not suggest radical change. Nevertheless, I argue that the emergence of this type of school is indicative of moods in post-Soviet society, which aside from education, find expression in other spheres of public life.

Institutionalizing Culture

An influential post-independence blueprint for education, written by a commission from the

Ministry of Education and released in December 1992, outlines how the educational system will be reformed in Ukraine to reflect changing political realities. The report claims that the reforms aim to eliminate the "authoritarian pedagogy put in place by a totalitarian state which led to the suppression of natural talents and capabilities and interests of all participants in the educational process." The Soviet insistence on uniformity and collectivism are values rejected outright in harsh language by this commission. To reverse the lumpenization of society produced by Soviet schools, they assert that the educational system must strive to develop "individuality, nationality, and morality" among primary and secondary school students. To achieve this, the proposed plan states that educational reform must be based on:

a national form of education, which is founded on the indivisibility of education from the national soil, the organic unity of national history and traditions, the preservation and enrichment of the culture of the Ukrainian people, the transformation of education into a significant instrument of national development and harmonious relations among nationalities."

Overall, the new Ukrainian government advocates a greater "humanitarian orientation" in curriculum design, including greater emphasis on aesthetics, law, ecology, and health, all subjects they feel were sorely ignored by Soviet authorities. The commission also announced the government's plans to break with the "totalizing" effects of standardized mass education, as they claim was the Soviet practice, and encourage experimental and private schools, each free to develop their own specializations, pedagogies, and curricula within certain state guidelines.

When this report was issued in December 1992, Ukrainian public schools had already begun the arduous task of converting to a post-Soviet Ukrainian-language curriculum by introducing Ukrainian as the official language of public education, by encouraging new interpretations of the Ukrainian historical experience, and by creating a tracking system (a four-tiered division of students according to ability), to name only the most significant changes. Soviet-trained public school teachers and administrators - many of whom have

only a rudimentary knowledge of Ukrainian - have retained their posts. Initially, there was little overt protest over the change to a Ukrainian-language curriculum, although, depending on the region, it implied considerable hardship for some teachers who had to learn the language before translating their lectures. Most teachers and administrators, in the grand Soviet tradition of "two personalities," simply accept the policy in word and passively resist it in deed. New and revised courses are hampered by shortages or a virtual absence of textbooks. This leaves the public schools trying to institutionalize a new world view with old cadres using outdated textbooks written in Russian and cluttered with references to the Soviet Union and Lenin.

Due to the economic crisis, meaningful numbers of new Ukrainian-language textbooks have yet to be written, let alone delivered to schools. History books for 11-year-olds (5th class) and for 18-year-olds (11th class) have been printed and released. More can be found for sale by black marketeers on the street than in school libraries. Both the Soviet and post-Soviet public schools take a strictly chronological approach to the teaching of history. Starting in the 5th class, they begin with Ancient Greece and Rome and move along a teleological, Eurocentric track until they finish the 11th class in contemporary times.

Ironically, the same authors wrote the Soviet and Ukrainian versions of the "History of Ukraine" textbook for the 11th class. This "restructuring" of historical interpretation, exchanging a communist ideology for a nationalist one, did little to reduce the oppressive politicization of history. Once again, historical interpretation is made a slave to the political machine. The only "revised" textbook available has already come under tremendous criticism for its inverted ideological slant.

The formal, structural aspects of Soviet education are easier to reform than the practices instilled by the values of the Soviet system. Aside from a rigorous adherence to a uniform curriculum, Soviet schools were characterized by strict discipline and relatively high standards of learning. The turbulence of post-Soviet society, coupled with extreme material hardship in school and at home, has prompted a sharp

decline in student performance, which all teachers and administrators lament.

In public schools today students are still obliged to work up to the level of the class standard in all subjects, underlining the importance of the collective over individual achievement and abilities. Public humiliation, rather than positive reinforcement, is considered the prime motivator and means of disciplining lazy or weak students who do not meet the class standard. The collective is once again reinforced by the practice of forming a class (regardless of ability and harmony) which remains together not only day after day as the students move from course to course but year after year until graduation eleven years later.

Under the Soviet system, all students wore uniforms, suit-like jackets and pants for boys and short brown dresses topped with a white or black apron for girls. Make-up, jewelry, or fancy hairstyling were strictly forbidden. Now most students, freed of their uniforms, try to make a fashion statement by the way they dress. The cult of materialism flourishes as each item of clothing or accessory indicates the type of connections one's parents have, whether they have access to hard currency, and the ability to travel abroad. Even during this period of extreme economic hardship, paying for an item is often the easy part. Working one's "canals" to locate it and then create the possibility to actually purchase it, can be infinitely more difficult. Hence, the acquisition of consumer goods reveals one's station in society and consumes the attention of status-conscious teenagers.

Double Burden

Most striking to Western eyes is the double duty that all students, parents, teachers and administrators are called upon to perform. This "double burden" has plagued all schools, Soviet and post-Soviet, public and private, elite and ordinary, and is the ultimate mixing of manual and intellectual labor. The children are more than just students. They are the school's janitors and gardeners. They wash walls, scrub floors, and prune bushes. Everyday two students from each class are "on duty." This means that they are responsible for cleaning the classroom, washing the blackboard, and running errands. On any given day, little girls with pompom pigtails in white aprons and

boys with their sleeves carefully rolled up can be seen dipping a tattered rag in a steel bucket to scrub down the stairwell.

It is not any easier for parents. They work a second shift as repairmen, renovators, and contractors. They often obtain the supplies needed to maintain the building and grounds and furnish and decorate the classrooms. Each summer before the new school year begins, teams of parents flood the schools to give a new coat of paint, put up wallpaper, make repairs, and hang posters and plants.

A teacher's job is never-ending as well. Teachers often double as the director's secretary, messenger, or errand runner. They spend hours not only writing but also typing worksheets, texts, etc. page by page using carbons. In each instance, those associated with the educational system are frequently called upon to do unwanted, menial tasks well below what they are (or are being) trained for simply to keep the schools functioning.

Schools are operating today amidst vestiges of Soviet structures, ideologies, and habits and the new values of "cowboy capitalism." With all schools running on dwindling state support, the responsibility for basic maintenance falls increasingly to parents, teachers, and administrators. This burden, of course, fuels the system of bribes at all levels of public and private education. When a student wants to enter a particular school, one of the first questions asked of his or her parents is, "What can you help us get [dostat]?" The vast shortage of goods has chased the very word "buy" from colloquial speech. It has been replaced with "get" or "obtain," suggesting the "canals" and contacts one must tap into and the Herculean effort one must make to procure goods. Parents must state their occupation or position. Most administrators are savvy enough to evaluate the likelihood of a parent's access to hard currency, deficit goods, or officials in positions of power based on their profession. Parents have the right to choose a school for their children. Technically, a school is obliged to accept all students in its district. But legal obligation and ability are de facto no longer sufficient criteria for admission to any school. In some instances the greed of directors or teachers drives the process of negotiating admission. Often enough directors are simply trying

to get basic supplies to keep the school functioning. The rule forbidding bribes is turning to utter fiction as fear of reprisal evaporates. Bribes and influence peddling increase in proportion to decreasing state support. Likewise, inspectors charged with investigating and punishing greedy administrators who blatantly demand outlandish bribes have equally succumbed to corruption.

The Protective Power of the State

Although government leaders have announced vast and grandiose plans to reform the educational system to reflect changing political and economic realities, those involved in education are acutely aware of the multitude of obstacles working against the Ukrainianization of public education. The educators who recently founded elite, experimental schools are often motivated by a conviction that only a state apparatus can protect Ukrainian language and culture against Russificatory trends and the encroachment of an omnipresent, commercialized, Hollywood mass culture. Indeed, many argue that without a state, Ukrainian culture would have simply drifted off to the "dustheap of history" as the population silently, steadily Russified. Yet, their belief in the protective power of the state is tempered by an entrenched skepticism in the ability of the government to act in the best interests of the Ukrainian people and to actually advance the Ukrainian cultural revival currently underway. To expedite the nation-building process, the founders of elite schools have circumvented the official educational bureaucracy by creating their own storefront schools with state funding. Although there is considerable variation among these schools in curricula, they have several elements in common: a radically new approach to the study of Ukrainian history, the inclusion of religion, an emphasis on creativity in the form of numerous art, music and theater classes, and a reduction in the traditional physical sciences to make way for earth sciences and ecology. Each of these shifts will be discussed before proceeding to profile three such schools in more depth.

Most notably, elite schools have moved beyond the state program to de-Sovietize the curriculum by de-Russifying their curricula as well. They teach history from a Ukraino-centric point of view, examining

historical events in terms of how they affected Ukraine and how Ukrainians affected them. In each instance, teachers seek to underline Ukraine's status as a European country by highlighting its tradition of statehood (in spite of the fact that there has never been an internationally-recognized Ukrainian state in the modern era), Ukraine's peaceful coexistence with neighboring countries, and its history of democratic institutions. A de-Russifying orientation to Ukrainian history often adds up to a large dose of Said's Orientalism for the Big Brother, as Russia is recast as an Asiatic Empire built on oppression and subjugation. (1979) The image of Ukraine as victimized by statelessness and colonialism is used to explain the chaotic and "uncivilized" state in which Ukrainian society is presently swirling. Ironically, the effects of statelessness are studied in conjunction with Ukraine's "tradition of statehood."

One of the most contested periods of history is Kievan Rus', which is marked by the acceptance of Christianity in 988 A.D. At that time, Kiev was a major trading center and has since become the Ukrainian capital. Yet it is referred to as "the mother of Russian cities" and the forerunner to the Russian state, in numerous pre-Revolutionary and Soviet texts. Many history teachers are reclaiming Kievan Rus' as a Ukrainian state, built by Ukrainians. It is held up as the genesis of the "1000-year tradition of state-building in Ukraine," a direct quote from the Ukrainian declaration of independence. Kievan Rus' flourished at a time when there were neither Russians nor Ukrainians, simply an eastern Slavic people.

As Anthony Smith (1987) has pointed out, without myths there would be no nations, only populations bound in political space. With so little cultural and linguistic distance between the "populations in political space" known today as Russia and Ukraine, myths of national genesis and national grandeur have become a critical ideological battleground for the definition of Ukrainian national identity. Such myths, often advanced by the cultural elite, tease apart the cultural and historic differences between Russians and Ukrainians to advance a national essence which justifies political independence and a separate state apparatus.

The Young Repent

History is not the only realm in which teaching differs significantly from elite to standard public schools. Religious education has emerged as another notable distinguishing factor. A class on the history of religion is offered on an optional basis in some public schools, where the teachers almost universally claim to be atheists. Religion is generally taught as Greek and Roman mythology. In many of these new private schools, religious study is mandatory. Religion classes cover such themes as ancient Ukrainian mythology, the history of religious practice including pagan rituals in Ukraine, and, perhaps most importantly, lessons on the vast array of religious holidays which are replacing Soviet holidays. In another curious twist, Soviet teachers often were required to stand outside churches on religious holidays to ensure that children did not attend holiday services. Teachers from these schools take the children to church on holidays to ensure that they *do* attend.

Fueling an interest in religion often creates sharp generational conflicts at home. During decades of Soviet rule, many parents went to church much like an excursion to an art museum --an outing to see beautiful things. Their children, often anxious to embrace the teachings of the church, are troubled by their parents' skepticism of organized religion, which remains highly politicized and often corrupt in Ukraine. The deep mistrust of the church's manipulative powers and memories of the Orthodox church's collaboration with the KGB keeps the older generations at bay. Undeterred, many children decide for themselves which service they will attend and go to church together. Regardless of which school they attend, the reversal of religious atheism is occurring, in spite of parental disdain, as the young rush to repent.

Aesthetic Sensitizing

In addition to a Ukrainocentric perspective on history and a religious component, the curricula at elite private schools distinguish themselves from public schools by emphasizing the importance of aesthetics. The specifics of the courses differ but theater, art, singing, or oratory classes are prominent in their curricula. An oft stated goal is to cultivate individuality, creativity, and confidence among

students. Performing and visual arts based on folk culture are a means to do so. In the post-Soviet world of nation-state, a folk-based culture is used to authenticate the construction of Ukrainian national identity. As the invention of cultural, linguistic, and historical differences accelerates, an essentialized, folkloric, ancestral-based interpretation of nationality keeps pace. Using blood-based concepts of nationality, the faculty consciously and strategically reconfigures conceptions of individual and collective identity in a process of de-Sovietizing through Ukrainianizing. Folk culture is held up as a means of redeeming the hopes of the past and eradicating the Soviet experience.

In conjunction with the emphasis on aesthetics, these schools devote more time to the study of nature and ecology as opposed to the traditional subjects of biology, chemistry, and physics. Given the ecological devastation everywhere apparent in Ukraine, the founders and teachers of these schools consider it paramount to reinstate a respect for the land among their students.

Within the Monastery

In January 1994 a small school opened on the grounds of the Kiev Pecherska Monastery called the Kiev Pecherska Collegium. The rector and founder of the school had been a history teacher in Soviet schools and an employee at one of the monastery's museums before opening his three-room school. The school's curriculum features theater, karate, oratory skills, Ukrainian literature, Ukrainian history, religion, *kraioznavstvo* or "Ukrainian material and spiritual culture," and offers a specialized program in archeology and museum studies. When the school opened, it had 16 students, nine girls and seven boys, ranging in ages from 11 to 15. Sixteen teachers, all on one-year renewable contracts, are employed at this school. Tuition as of spring 1994 was 200,000 kupons a month (ca. \$3), making education here a luxury for almost all save the old and new monied classes. Tuition pays teachers' salaries. The main sponsor, a financial services company, contributes student lunches and material support for the school and, of course, the Orthodox church provides the building. In addition, the school runs a kiosk that sells artwork to tourists on the grounds of the

monastery to earn money to support the school. This combination of sources has thus far allowed the school to refuse state funding, thereby freeing its curriculum of state requirements.

According to the rector, the biggest obstacle to the school's success is the very entity he wishes to protect: the state. He laments the "colonial psychology" of bureaucrats resistant to educational reform who "do nothing but open sabotage." "They will never fight for Ukraine," he sighs, "Their job is their feed box [kormushka] and they can't tear themselves away. When important people in the administration couldn't stand khokholi [a pejorative term for Ukrainians] yesterday, then today they can't fall in love with them. They'll stand on the barricades to defend their positions but they won't let us in," he says. In spite of endless problems and, what one teacher referred to as the rector's bulldozer approach to solving them, he seems undaunted by the challenge of launching this school to create a new generation "that is not psychologically twisted like my own."

Recently, the rector turned away a bank that wanted to contribute to the school because it was not in keeping with the "national idea of the Collegium." The bank stipulated that the aid come in the form of a Russian culture class. Much like at public schools across Ukraine, Russian literature has been eliminated as a subject and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are now covered in the "world literature" class. At this school, like at many other private schools, Russian language is now considered a "foreign language," on a level with, say, Polish or Czech.

I realized how slowly the Soviet past fades when the students at this Collegium reminded me that I had arrived on Lenin's birthday, April 22. Although his birthday hadn't been celebrated in schools for three years (and some of these students were old enough to have partaken only once or twice in a school celebration of Lenin's birthday), three years after Ukrainian independence the children paused nonetheless to note Lenin's birth and to tell me of all the school festivities they had enjoyed.

The Folk and the Nation

Another elite school, the Kiev Mohyla Collegium, opened one year after independence in 1992 in a

renovated day care center on the outskirts of Kiev, offering a specialized program of study in aesthetics. The program is specifically designed to foster creativity and individuality. All classes are conducted in Ukrainian. In its first year this school accepted twenty-six 11-year-olds to the 5th class, each year adding a new 5th class. The director personally selected the teachers from among former public school teachers or university lecturers. The director previously was a Communist Party member and worked as a school inspector. More recently, he has authored a book on Ukrainian folklore.

Admission to the Collegium is selective and based primarily on three criteria: an assessment of the psychological condition of the child, his or her level of verbal skill, which is tested by a dictation in Ukrainian, and an analysis of the child's character. An unspoken criterion for admission here, as at all schools, is the parents' ability to procure scarce or "deficit" goods and services necessary for running the school. Parents are primarily members of Kiev's intelligentsia and nouveaux riches. Most are fierce critics of Soviet-styled education and they seek a radical alternative for their own child's education. At the Collegium some of the children speak Russian at home, all of them speak it on the streets of Kiev, but not one offers resistance when required to speak Ukrainian at school. Rather, they lament the "unnaturalness" of Ukrainians speaking Russian in the Ukrainian capital.

To reinstate consciousness of a particular cultural heritage the Collegium offers an extensive array of courses designed to develop aesthetic sensibilities. In reaction to the aesthetic desensitizing fostered by the seemingly omnipresent gray drabness of Soviet architecture, the founder of the Collegium has pioneered a curriculum which features folk traditions, folksongs, folk crafts, folk theater, and folk dancing. A reduction of instruction in natural sciences, a strength of Soviet schools and a requirement in Ukrainian schools today, has cleared the way to expand the humanitarian side of the Collegium's curriculum.

Aesthetic training becomes a vehicle by which to inculcate the national component of the curriculum. The students perform folk tales in theater class and in

choir and music classes they sing Ukrainian folk melodies, which are legendary for their melancholy and beauty. All children study arts and crafts in addition to drawing and calligraphy. By incorporating a folk-based interpretation of Ukrainian national culture into performance at school, the folk songs, folk costumes, folk traditions, etc. become part of the experience and memory of youth for these children.

By the time the Collegium opened its doors in September 1992, it had already fulfilled the goal of many elite schools. The administration found three banks to support their specialized program of study, allowing the director to develop and implement his version of an ideal curriculum and refuse state funding for the first two years. The school must pay a 37% tax on all cash donations received from sponsors. This is a sharp incentive to encourage funding in the form of goods and services, yet this leaves the Collegium hard pressed to pay salaries. When the school opened, five children whose parents work at the banks sponsoring the school applied for admission. Two were accepted and a third began attending in January.

When the director set the Collegium's tuition in 1992-93 at 10,000 kupons for the entire year, this was worth approximately \$335. During the academic year, the kupon drastically lost value. At the beginning of the next academic year 10,000 kupons was worth only 63 cents. The combination of a rapidly devaluing kupon and hyperinflation destroys any incentive to develop an endowment which would otherwise be necessary as tuition covers only 2% of the annual operating budget. In addition to the director and two vice directors, both of whom teach, the school employs one full-time fund-raiser among its administrators. As support from the banks became precarious by 1994-95, the Collegium began to accept state funding.

Now this school, like other private schools, has a longer day as students fulfill curricula, both the state's and the school's specialized program of study. Much as the first Collegium discussed has a special relationship with the Kiev Pecherska Monastery, this Collegium has established an affiliation with the Kiev Mohyla Academy, an independent institution of higher learning. The Academy's highly nationalistic

program of study has earned it the nickname, "new higher party school," after the old "higher party schools," which trained Communist Party cadres.

Recapturing the Essence

There are many ways in which reformulated gender relations and gender-based conceptions of self are promoted in elite schools. While public schools remain coed, almost all of these elite schools advocate single sex education. The faculty of the Collegium shares the conviction that Soviet society contaminated and vulgarized the essence of masculinity and femininity in the course of pursuing gender equality. They believe the system empowered and masculinized women, particularly in the workplace, at the expense of men, who were correspondingly disempowered, denied the role of provider and encouraged to take refuge in drink. The Soviet project to create gender equality deformed the inherent psychological subtleties that differentiate men from women, they argue. Women did achieve measured advances in the public sphere, through education and professional development, and assumed positions of some authority and power. Yet in spite of these gains, on the home front gender roles always remained very traditional with basic household duties, including childcare, routinely considered women's work.

To peel back the corruptive influence of the Soviet system on gender identities, roles, and relations, the Collegium offers a course called "psycho-training." Given the tense situation in the country, which often spills over into a stressful home life, the administration feels that such a class is necessary for the psychological well-being of each child. Anna Alexandrovna, the psycho-training teacher, formerly taught in Soviet schools. She traces the general anomie, indifference, and brutality of contemporary Ukrainian society, not to mention a birth rate so low that the population is declining, to the absence of a mother at home. She, like many others, thinks working mothers and day care are aberrations. (She is a working mother herself!) As she sees it, the mission of her female students is to have many children, care for them, and educate them in a patriotic spirit. Patriotism, she argues, comes from mother's milk.

In the girls' psycho-training class, they discuss astrological signs, the correlation between emotions and colors, and the importance of nurturing. The teacher hopes to "sharpen their intuition, raise their energy levels, and deflect aspirations to power." At the beginning of each class, which is held once a week, each girl chooses a color which she feels represents her mood at that moment. Sitting in a circle on the floor, the girls explain their choice of color and why they are feeling the way they do. Anna Alexandrovna believes in the powers and insights of astrology. By examining the personality strengths and weaknesses associated with each girl's sign, they discuss how one can best overcome weaknesses in character.

If the emphasis of the girls' psycho-training class is on relationships and stimulating communication and sensitivity, the boys' class focuses on developing the morals and values necessary to lead. As part of their preparation to become the post-Soviet elite, the boys are encouraged to be decisive, self-confident, and committed to serving Ukraine through proactive problem solving. Anna Alexandrovna tries to foster self-confidence by engaging the boys in role playing, sometimes relying solely on non-verbal communication. They also keep a journal, which she reads and discusses periodically with each student. With rates of emigration soaring and the romantization of life in the West especially high among youth, the director considers it a top priority to instill a commitment to solving Ukraine's problems among his male students. He is not interested in training sharp minds who will then emigrate to America and use their Ukrainian-learned skills to benefit Western society. This is a familiar pattern which Ukrainian teachers have seen all too often over the past 15 years.

The conviction that boys and girls have different innate abilities and psychologies is also operative in other classes, all of which are single-sex. The choice of readings in literature class and the choice of topics assigned in creative writing class at the Collegium are guided by the conviction that girls and boys have different capabilities, divergent patterns of learning, and are destined for different roles in society. The teaching of literature and creative writing are used to

further enhance gender distinctions by re-masculinizing boys and re-feminizing girls.

Pre-Revolutionary Traditions

Another means of gender revision and nation-building is the resurrection of the pre-revolutionary tradition of "Boys' Humanitarian Gymnasiums." In 1990 one opened in the eastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia and a second in L'viv, the largest Ukrainian-speaking city in Ukraine. With 45 students in two grades, the L'viv Gymnasium is a hyper-nationalist enclave located within an ordinary Russian-language Soviet-styled school. After independence enrollment in Russian-language schools dropped and this school was left with excess classroom space. Part of the government funding the Gymnasium receives is five classrooms, one of which serves as a teachers' room.

To explain why he chose a 19th century aristocratic tradition as a model for post-Soviet education, the director, a historian and former teacher, said, "Without a cultural elite, the nation cannot exist. This elite will, of course, be male as it has always been. With the limited resources that we have today, we must focus our efforts exclusively on a select group of boys."

The director is also preoccupied with redirecting gender relations. He is particularly concerned about the increasing contempt men and women have for each other as evidenced by a high divorce rate and the multitude of women who choose to forego marriage and simply raise a child on their own. Single sex education, he argues, encourages boys to develop respect for girls. In today's post-Soviet consumer euphoria, single sex education curbs the cult of materialism and Madonna-inspired desire for sexualized bodily ornamentation. The director of the Gymnasium abhors the current fashion of mini skirts, make-up, and garish jewelry, which suddenly appeared on the bodies of 16-year-olds when the requirement for uniforms was dropped in many public schools. The 15 and 16-year-old boys at this Gymnasium are obliged to wear a suit and tie everyday to school. The students claim that it sets a tone of professionalism and that they willingly wear this new type of uniform.

The director and several teachers of the Gymnasium argue that peer pressure in coed classrooms creates a hierarchy based on looks and access to status goods such as western clothing. A single sex environment promotes a different type of competition, he claims, as student leaders at this school are chosen by their peers based on ability and demonstrated intelligence. Furthermore, the director insists, uniforms and a single-sex environment set a tone of discipline and order sorely needed in post-Soviet Ukrainian society. The director further buttresses his decision to exclude girls by arguing that his school demands more class hours, an additional two and a half hours a day, to fulfill the state curriculum plus the Gymnasium's specialized courses in law, ethics, and foreign languages. The discipline and physical strength needed to keep up with an intense, challenging, and elite program of study is just something girls don't have, he argues.

The motivation to create a school specializing in law and ethics was born after the director's first trip abroad to Germany. Impressed by the smoothly functioning German society, their punctuality, and the notion that Germans make and fulfill commitments, he returned to Ukraine with a mission: instilling order in the face of disorder for these young boys, for the future elite of Ukraine.

Conclusion

Children who attend elite schools actually enjoy the experience and claim they look forward to coming to school. Rekindling a curiosity for learning and a respect for knowledge amidst economic chaos and enormous social tension is a remarkable achievement of these schools. This is in sharp contrast to the dread that permeates the attitude of students in public schools. Aside from stolen moments with friends during breaks, students in public schools say they detest being there, have little respect for the teachers, and claim that most of what they know they learned in spite of the system. It is with mixed emotions that parents turn their children over to the public schools, cognizant of the psychological bruises and damage to self-esteem that the system is notorious for inflicting on young minds. Although these new elite schools share a common ideological agenda of nation-building with public schools, their elite orientation,

emphasis on religious revival, and gender essentialism, sets them apart from public schools in Ukraine.

Nationalism and nation-building often place a burden on the female half of the population. Casting women as birthing machines, bearers of tradition, and creators of patriotism disempowers them as it firmly sequesters them at home. Returning women to the hearth also hides rising unemployment and underemployment as women "voluntarily" retreat into the private sphere. The advances achieved by the Soviet system in creating professional opportunities for women are rapidly vanishing. The combined effects of economic collapse and a national and religious revival have left women in a severely disadvantaged position. A look at elite schools, most of which unashamedly grant advantages to boys, does little to suggest that the situation for women in post-Soviet society will improve anytime soon.

Although private schools represent a fragile enterprise battling incessant problems, I believe we can expect more elite schools to open doors for business in the upcoming years. The state in post-Soviet society is simultaneously revered for its ability to protect Ukrainian cultural interests even as the government is discredited for its lack of ability to enhance the material well-being of the Ukrainian people. This paradox has produced profound skepticism among the intelligentsia toward state-designed public education and its ability to teach children the values and skills needed to ride out this excruciatingly difficult period of transition. The founders and faculty of elite schools are committed to an independent Ukrainian state because of the protection it provides for Ukrainian language and culture even as they remain concerned about the state's ability to survive. One thing is for certain. The construction of a culturally distinct Ukrainian nation, which will be used to justify an independent Ukrainian state in the face of sharp economic decline, amounts to another revolution, a second "social experiment," with consequences every bit as great as those that followed in 1917.

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