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Becoming Relevant After Communism: Andrei Kurkov as Postcolonial Writer

Victor d'Anethan – 2208865
MA Russian and Eurasian Studies
Supervisor: Dr. O. F. Boele
v.h.f.danethan@umail.leidenuniv.nl
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"*An endless blue circle, in it a star*"

Migration (1929), Milos Crnjanski

Introduction

"Украина должна сделать русский язык своей культурной собственностью"[1].

Andrei Kurkov shows with these provocative words his stance regarding the apple of discord that has agitated Ukraine since its independence in 1991. The country, straddled between two continents, has been over the centuries the home of a plethora of different peoples, ethnicities who appropriated it as their land as invasions and kingdoms passed. In the course of its troubled history, the country was ruled by several major powers; the Kievan Rus', the Golden Horde, the different forms of Polish and Lithuanian conglomerates, the Russian empire and after a very brief period of independence, the Soviet Union. When it comes to define the nature of the Ukrainian territories, scholars have resorted to the term of "borderlands"[2]. These lands have always constituted a disputed zone between tribes and empires, and this has deeply contributed to create hybrid communities with ambivalent allegiances which do not favour the advent of uniform nation-building processes[3]. One of the result of this troubled history is the cultural and linguistic Russian presence in a country that is striving, since its independence, to achieve its nation-building process and to rid itself from the influence of the former hegemon. In the context of the painful disintegration of the Soviet union, this contested legacy has been considered an obstacle hindering the nation-building process oriented towards Ukrainisation and thus, has constituted one of the main issue of dispute in Ukraine's political and cultural life.

The 19th century was the century of "national awakenings"[4] during which newly independent nations began to "imagine themselves as nations"[5]. However, due to the hazards of history, the Eastern

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[1] Aleksandr Kurilenko, "Andrei Kurkov: «Ukraina Dolzhna Sdelat' Russkiy Yazyk Svoyey Kul'turnoy Sobstvennost'yu»," *DSnews.ua,* January 10,2018. http://www.dsnews.ua/politics/andrey-kurkov-putinu-ne-vazhno-chto-dumayut-ukrainskie-russkie--02012018220000; "Ukraine must make the Russian language its own cultural specificity" (Unless specified otherwise, translations are mine).

[2] Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "From Borderlands to Bloodlands," *Eurozine*, September 19, 2014. https://www.eurozine.com/from-borderlands-to-bloodlands/; Yaroslav Hrytsak, "The Postcolonial is not Enough," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 734.

[3] Zhurzhenko, "Borderlands."

[4] Andrew B. Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant After Communism: The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 13.

[5] Yvonne Howell, "A Clash of Fictions: Geopolitics in recent Russian and Ukrainian Literature," *Japanese Slavic and East European Studies* 37, (2016): 1.

European wave started later, and the First World War as well as the advent of the Soviet Union silenced these attempts of national self-realisation[6]. Unsurprisingly, the collapse of the communist dream at the end of the 20th century gave the opportunity to oppressed nations to claim back their national identity and to relaunch the interrupted process. In Ukraine, such project was carried by Ukrainian-speaking writers which strived to accomplish what Wachtel describes as defining "a given nation's particularity, be that in the realm of national history, destiny, or "soul"[7]". Their productions were directly attempting to define the Ukrainian national identity[8]. On the contrary, Russian-speaking writers did not participate in that national movement and, as their language remained associated with the Soviet past and the practices of Russification, never fully integrated in Ukrainian literary life[9].

The Maidan revolution of 2014 has brought a radical change in Ukrainian political and cultural life. The three months of protests which led to the overthrow of former president Victor Yanukovych, followed by the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the eruption of pro-Russian separatism in the East, brutally brought the issues of cultural and political ties with the neighbour to the forefront. Since then, Ukrainian society has become highly polarised. However, scholars writing for the academic journal *Ab Imperio* have defined this phenomenon as a 'postcolonial revolution' as it brings the formation of a new political community, which differs from anticolonial and national liberation movements[10]. Drawing on the postcolonial concept of hybridity, they argue that Ukrainian identity, developed during the revolution, rests on a civic rather than an ethnolinguistic conception and thus, allows Russian-speakers to express their belonging to the Ukrainian nation[11]. Similarly, this phenomenon has been noticeable among Russian-speaking writers who, in the context of the tensions with Russia, have found a way to promote their Ukrainian patriotism while exalting their dual identity[12]. This new hybridity translates in practices of dis-identification with Russia[13] and the deterritorialisation

[6] Howell, "Clash of Fictions," 1.
[7] Wachtel, *Remaining*, 100.
[8] See the case of Oksana Zabuzhko in Wachtel, "Remaining," 100.
[9] Marco Puleri, "Ukraïns'kyi, Rosiis'komovnyi, Rosiis'kyi: Self-Identification in Post-Soviet Ukrainian Literature in Russian," *Ab Imperio* 2, (2014): 378-380; Khersonskii, Boris. "On the languages of Ukrainian poetry," *The Odessa Review*, December 2, 2016. http://odessareview.com/languages-ukrainian-poetry/
[10] Ilya Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum," *Ab Imperio* 3, (2014): 28-30.
[11] *Ibid*, 32.
[12] Ilya Kukulin, ""The Long-Legged Time is Fording the War": The Postcolonial Condition of the Russian-Language Poetry in Ukraine," in *Postcolonial Slavic Literatures After Communism*, edited by Klavdia Smola and Dirk Uffelmann, (New York: PL Academic Research, 2016), 164-165.
[13] *Ibid*, 166.

of the Russian language because it "is not necessarily linked to a particular territory or entity and a particular ethnicity"[14].

Andrei Kurkov is one of the most famous Russian-speaking Ukrainian writers. His literary productions cover issues such as the post-Soviet transition, individualism, Russian-Ukrainian relations, the European connections of his country, and the current conflict in the Donbas region. He has always publicly claimed his double roots and his sense of belonging as a Ukrainian citizen. Moreover, he adamantly promotes the recognition of the Russian language as a Ukrainian cultural specificity, necessary, according to him, in order to rid Ukraine of its cultural and political dependence on Russia[15]. Needless to say that such a position is not well received in today's Ukraine.

This objective of this thesis is to study Andrei Kurkov's role as a writer within Ukraine's postcolonial condition. I analyse in what ways he relates to the postcolonial concept of hybridity which emerged during the Maidan revolution. I argue that he does not only integrate himself perfectly in the new hybrid Ukrainian identity conceptualised by the academic literature but constitutes its prime proponent through his role in the public sphere. Indeed, while other writers tend to stay in the realm of fiction to express this hybrid identity (or to question it), the fact that Kurkov actively aims to achieve a form of postcolonial process, through the concrete and official deterritorialisation of the Russian language, makes him a postcolonial writer. Ultimately, I argue that such advocacy contributes to create more spaces of expression for Russian-speakers and improves the role of Russian-speaking writers in Ukraine. While post-Soviet writers were struggling with the issue of "remaining relevant"[16], in post-Maidan Ukraine, Russian-speaking writers are 'becoming' relevant.

If the postcolonial concept of hybridity constitutes an important element for the study of Ukrainian literature in Russian[17], it has not been applied, to my knowledge, to a specific writer. Given the fact that the Maidan revolution has brought the postcolonial framework to the forefront, this thesis aims to fill this gap. Similarly, there have been very few academic works written on Kurkov and these have solely focused on the content of his books. The novelty of this work is that I focus on his role as a writer. In his book entitled *Remaining Relevant After Communism*, Andrew Wachtel attempts to define the different roles played by writers in post-communist societies. In order to do so, he mostly focuses

[14] Marco Puleri, "Hybridity Reconsidered: Ukrainian Border Crossing After the "Crisis"," *Ab Imperio* 2, (2017): 266.
[15] Kurilenko, "Andrei Kurkov."
[16] Wachtel, *Remaining.*
[17] Kukulin, "The Long-Legged Time"; Puleri, "Hybridity"; Puleri, Self-Identification."

on their public activities and in which field they position themselves within their society: politics, nationalism, journalism, etc[18]. In this thesis, I narrow the scope down to one new category: the writer and postcolonialism. I decide to follow a similar approach to the one used by Wachtel as I draw on Kurkov's relationship with reality. On the one hand, I analyse his non-fictional account, *Dnevnik Maidana*, as the Maidan revolution constitutes the starting point of the recent postcolonial approach to Ukraine. On the other, I also draw on his public opinions voiced through interviews[19], posts on social media as well as his activities in the literary field. Secondly, I use this material to apply in a qualitative manner the concept of postcolonial hybridity on the person of Kurkov. I identify the main characteristics and study whether he can be considered to embrace the postcolonial movement in today's Ukraine.

This thesis is divided in two main parts. In the first part (**I)**, I present the identity issues of contemporary Ukraine in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the drastic change which occurred with the Maidan revolution. I continue by exploring the reasons which made scholars draw on postcolonial paradigms to study Ukraine and how they apply the concept of hybridity. In the second part of this thesis (**II**), I use the postcolonial reading grid developed by the recent academic literature to study Kurkov's journal of the Maidan and his activism in the public sphere.

[18] Wachtel, *Remaining*.
[19] Including one conducted with the author of this thesis.

Part I – Ukraine and the Postcolonial Revolution

Chapter 1 – Ukraine's Identities and the Legacy of the Empire

A) Clashing Visions

The collapse of the USSR was viewed by Eastern European populations as a liberation from Soviet rule rather than the failure of a collective project[20]. Consequently, Ukraine entered a period of nation and state-building by putting the emphasis on the revival of Ukrainian culture, and naturally, the language. In addition to migration policies, the Russian empire, desiring to retain cultural superiority in addition to political domination, once carried out policies of russification and restricted the use of the Ukrainian language. This was furthered by the Soviet authorities during the 20th century which, while having not officially forbidden the Ukrainian language, imposed Russian as the vehicular language in the Soviet Union[21]. These historical periods of suppression placed the issue of language at the centre of the struggle for national liberation in Ukraine[22]. At the fall of the Soviet union, all conditions were gathered for it to be a topic of harsh dispute.

It is particularly interesting to note that the last official census regarding these features has been realised in 2001, probably to avoid underlining the population's discrepancies which would hinder the desired 'homogenous' nation-building process. Despite the fact that Ukrainian is the only official language, the numbers show a strikingly large presence of people who consider Russian their mother tongue or use it as a vehicular language in everyday life, mainly located in the Southern and Eastern parts of Ukraine[23]. They constitute, respectively, 17% and 14.8% of the population, amounting to approximately 14 million Ukrainians on a population of 44 million[24]. In addition to Ukrainian and Russian, there are numerous other languages being spoken in the country such as Romanian, Hungarian, and Polish.

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[20] Alfred B. Jr. Evans, "The failure of democratization in Russia: A comparative perspective," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011): 48.
[21] Nikita, Taranko Acosta, "Ukrainisation à marche forcée," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2019. https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2019/05/TARANKO_ACOSTA/59874
[22] Marko Pavlyshyn, "Literary History as Provocation of National Identity, National Identity as Provocation of Literary History: The Case of Ukraine," *Thesis Eleven* 136, no. 1 (2016): 77.
[23] Acosta, "Ukrainisation à marche forcée,"
[24] Puleri, "Hybridity," 261.

Such linguistic and ethnic diversity of the country has been an important element in the way scholars have studied Ukraine. Samuel Huntington, in his now famous and widely commented book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, claimed that Ukraine was a country divided by a civilizational internal border between East and West[25]. As Tanya Zaharchenko argues, such claim has deeply affected the way in which not only scholars but also politics and intellectuals have approached the linguistic and ethnic situation of Ukraine[26]. The most emblematic paradigm derived from this conflicting view is the theory of the two Ukraines as developed in the early 1990s, by, among others, Mykola Riabchuk, a prominent Ukrainian scholar[27]. According to the latter, the country is divided between two main communities, impervious to each other: 'real' Ukrainians, possessing the ethnic and linguistic elements of the Ukrainian nation and oriented towards the West, and Eastern Ukrainians, speaking Russian, connected to the former Soviet rule and more reluctant of following a Western path[28]. This conflictual argument was pushed by scholars who deemed possible the emergence of internal conflicts between autochthones and alleged allochthones[29].

Scholars such as Tanya Zaharchenko and Tatiana Zhurzhenko have criticised the paradigm not because it does not rest on well-grounded facts and differences regarding self-perceived identities but mainly due to inherent flaws which make it a perilous concept. Tanya Zaharchenko has criticised the fact that the paradigm has been essentially established in opposition with Ukraine's Russian neighbour and the totalitarian past associated with it, and with a Western-Ukrainian vision of the nation which, therefore, fails to grasp the complex reality of the country[30]. Consequently, it can serve as a powerful political tool in two ways, which are contained in the words of Tatiana Zhurzhenko:

> "According to the belief of pro-nationalist Ukrainian intellectuals and of many Western political experts, after 1991 these specific conditions [the legacy of the russification policies performed under imperial and Soviet rule] made it difficult to mobilize the largely ethnically mixed and Russian speaking population of Eastern

[25] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 165 cited in Tanya Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet: Frontiers of Memory in Post-Soviet Fiction of Kharkiv, Ukraine* (New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 40.
[26] Tanya Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet*, 40.
[27] Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "The Myth of Two Ukraines, A Commentary on Mykola Riabchuk's "Ukraine: One State, two Countries"?" *Eurozine*, September 17, 2002. (Accessed on January 2, 2019). URL: https://www.eurozine.com/the-myth-of-two-ukraines/
[28] Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "The Myth,".
[29] Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet,* 40.
[30] *Ibid*, 40-41.

> Ukraine for the mass support of the "national idea". Thus, from the point of view of Western critics, Eastern Ukrainians turned into the worse part of the nation. Seen as a Russified, or rather Sovietized population, as people who lost their identity, they are perceived as the main obstacle for democratic transformation. Consequently, Russian language became a synonym of pro-communist orientation and Soviet nostalgia, of dangerous ideas like pan-Slavism and the re-unification with Russia."[31]

Firstly, the "clash-of-civilisations" paradigm enables politicians to put the blame on the "insufficiently Ukrainian" citizens for the difficulties met in the nation-building process begun after Ukrainian independence[32]. In an epoch in which the concept of national identity is mainly seen in terms of ethnicity and language[33], the presence of Russian speaking communities is regarded as an unpleasant obstacle on the path of national liberation from the former oppressor and for the creation of a homogenous national identity. Secondly, it serves as a way to depict Russian speakers as the backward culprits who hinder the democratic transition by voting for oligarchs or communists[34]. The paradigm has emerged as an easy explanation for the disappointments of the Ukrainian state's early years[35]. Eastern Ukrainians have not blindly embraced attempts to "Ukrainise" them and have shown less enthusiasm towards the West than their Western compatriots. Moreover, it also surmises Ukraine's rapprochement with the West and democracy, incompatible with any identification with Russia and what is associated with it: totalitarianism and imperialism[36]. Along with the critics regarding the political use, other scholars have expressed different doubts. For example, Peter Rodgers has found that the regional identity is as relevant as the language or ethnicity when it comes to self-perceived identity[37]. Furthermore, Andrei Portnov has stressed the irrelevant character of the Manichean vision opposing the East, nostalgic of Stalin, and the West, overflowing with fascists[38]. Such distinction usually served the political purposes of elites playing on divisions to attract the voters' support[39].

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[31] Zhurzhenko, "The Myth,".
[32] Andrei Portnov, *Uprazhneniia s istoriei po-ukrainsky* (Moscow: Memorial, 2010), 71 cited in Tanya Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet*, 41.
[33] Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet,* 41-42.
[34] Zhurzhenko, "The Myth".
[35] Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet,* 53.
[36] *Ibid*, 53.
[37] Peter W. Rodgers, *Nation, Region and History in Post-Communist Transitions: Identity Politics in Ukraine, 1991–2006* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2008), 34.
[38] Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet*, 41.
[39] Volodymyr Kulyk, "National Identity in Ukraine: Impact of Euromaidan and the War," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 4 (2016): 593.

Despite these caveats, it is important to note that there is a significant divide among the population in terms of political ideas and the way Ukrainian citizens express their sense of belonging. While there is no stark and homogenous division, studies show trends which are distributed along ethnic and linguistic lines. In his study on the national identity in Ukraine, Volodymyr Kulyk provides an overview of different studies on Ukrainian identity and underlines strong differences between the East and West. In the course of the 2000s, inhabitants of Donetsk, the most Eastern populations, and therefore predominantly ethnic Russians or Russian speakers, would identify more as Russians and to the common culture uniting Eastern Slavs than with Western Ukrainians[40]. Such identification also influenced their desires with regard to the foreign policy of Ukraine. Contrary to their Western compatriots, they tend to prefer to remain close to Russia while the latter would prefer a rapprochement with the West[41]. These differences in opinions, whether concerning foreign policy or notions of the past, are strongly linked to the language people feel connected to[42]. However, these trends do not preclude the existence of a diffused sense of belonging to the Ukrainian state among Russian-speakers and ethnic Russians[43].

B) Is Ukraine Postcolonial?

In the years after the collapse of the USSR, the themes of democratisation and economic transition have progressively given the floor to other patterns of developments in the cultural field[44]. As the fall of the Soviet Union has left legacies similar to the ones of colonial empires, scholars have drawn on academic literature related to postcolonial countries and "post-imperial" issues. By transposing postcolonial paradigms on post-Soviet Ukraine, scholars have attempted to unveil mechanisms of cultural dependence between former Soviet republics and the former hegemon, Russia, as well as unsuccessful attempts at nation-building. As an empire falls, it does not mean that the dynamics between the former centre and periphery fade away.

The application of the postcolonial framework on the post-Soviet space has raised doubts, primarily from scholars who applied it themselves. In their book *Postcolonial Slavic Literatures After Communism*,

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[40] Kulyk, "National," 592.
[41] *Ibid*, 593.
[42] See Volodymyr, Kulyk, "Language identity, linguistic diversity and political cleavages: evidence from Ukraine." *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 3 (2011): 627–648.
[43] BusinessUkraine. "Russian Language in Ukraine." *BusinessUkraine*, May 17, 2017. http://bunews.com.ua/society/item/the-russian-language-in-ukraine
[44] Richard Sakwa, "Ukraine and the Postcolonial Condition," *openDemocracy*, September 18, 2015. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-and-postcolonial-condition/

Klavdia Smola and Dirk Uffelmann argue that the post-Soviet space presents far more complicated aspects than the classic examples of colonialism as the tremendous amounts of cultural, linguistic and religious interconnections and the numerous empires which overlapped throughout history make it harder to identify clear oppressors and oppressed peoples[45]. If we take a look at classical forms of colonisation, for example, the British empire and its Indian possessions, we face the case of a foreign power ruling over a population that is, culturally, completely alien to it. Applying the model developed on the latter on the former case might constitute a precipitated shortcut as the situations present different traits.

This concern is shared by Yaroslav Hrytsak, a prominent Ukrainian historian. Although acknowledging that postcolonial studies can bring fresh perspectives on dynamics between Russia and Ukraine, he insists that one must tread softly when applying the postcolonial framework on the latter[46]. Although Ukraine's past is constituted of "colonial experiences", the main problem would consist in bypassing the fact that throughout history, Ukraine was more centre than periphery[47]. Indeed, Kievan Rus', which was located on today's Ukrainian territories, is considered by Russia to be the starting point of its history and is also the location of the creation of Orthodoxy. This has made Ukraine a place of prime symbolical and historical value for Russia and created a deeply embedded common history between the two countries. Thus, claiming that Ukraine was a 'colony' is inaccurate. By overlooking long historical developments and reducing the Russo-Ukrainian relationship to a domination model, the postcolonial framework ends up focusing too much on the language issue[48]. In this light, the enduring presence of the Russian language in Ukraine is seen only as a detrimental extraneous component that needs to be erased.

However, scholars who have recently drawn on postcolonial paradigms have strived to integrate these warnings in order to apply postcolonial theory in the most relevant manner. The phenomena which characterise this area of the world are not unique and drawing on other models can help academia using alternative frames on the cultural and political renegotiations which are observable between all countries of the former USSR since its collapse[49]. David Chioni Moore has argued that the study of

[45] Klavdia Smola and Dirk Uffelmann. *Postcolonial Slavic Literatures After Communism* (New York: PL Academic Research, 2016), 15.
[46] Yaroslav Hrytsak, "The Postcolonial is not Enough," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 732.
[47] Hrytsak, "The Postcolonial," 733-734.
[48] *Ibid*, 737.
[49] Smola and Uffelmann. *Postcolonial Slavic Literatures After Communism*, 9.

the 'post' regarding former colonies can help frame the research on the post-Soviet space[50]. In other words, as we are facing in both cases a situation of 'post', interpretative frames can be shared for mutual influence. Furthermore, Russia has developed new forms of imperialism towards its former subjects and this actualised version of domination has led scholars to integrate different paradigms of postcolonial studies[51]. Indeed, "postcolonial discourse lends its Eastern European counterpart critical tools for discussing relations of power between centre and the periphery, as well as issues of exile/migration, dislocation, hybridized communities, and hegemonic discourses" [52]. Dobrota Pucherova and Robert Gafrik, further the claim that both studies can influence and confirm each other[53]. Consequently, the experiences of the 20th century's colonies might be used to understand the forces at work in the contemporary relationship between Russia and Ukraine when addressing the issues of double identities, linguistic minorities or neo-imperialism.

These scholars agree with Hrytsak's view that postcolonial paradigms are indeed "not enough". Nevertheless, he writes, "it might be useful to stress selected concepts of postcolonial studies such as hybridity or inbetweenness that are compatible with interpretative routines such as deconstruction (Gall) or global paradigms such as transnationality or world literature (Hausbacher)"[54]. This group of authors use postcolonial paradigms as starting points to grasp the complexities of the post-Soviet area. As Igor Torbakov writes, "some insights offered by scholars of colonial and postcolonial studies might enhance understandings of Ukrainian-Russian multifaceted entanglements"[55]. The complexities of this relationship are precisely the reasons why these scholars have resorted to such paradigms with the aim to readapt them to the post-Soviet realities. They know very well that Ukraine was not a colony in the strict sense. However, Ukraine has postcolonial features and given their intricate nature, postcolonial concepts can be used to decipher the country's complex and unresolved identity issues.

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[50] David Chioni Moore. "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Towards a Global Postcolonial Critique." *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (January 2001): 111–128.
[51] Smola and Uffelmann, *Postcolonial Slavic Literatures,* 11.
[52] Sandru, Cristina. "Textual Resistance: 'Over-Coding' and Ambiguity in (Post)Colonial and (Post)Communist Texts." *in Postcolonialim/Postcommunism: Intersections and Overlaps*, ed. Monica Bottez, Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru and Bogdan Stefanescu (Bucharest: Editura Universitatii din Bucuresti, 2011), 44 cited in Smola and Uffelmann, *Postcolonial Slavic Literatures*, 12.
[53] Dobrota Pucherova and Robert Gafrik, "Introduction: Which Postcolonial Europe?" in *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures*, edited by Dobrota Pucherova and Robert Gafrik, (Leiden, Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 12-13.
[54] Smola and Uffelmann, *Postcolonial Slavic Literatures*, 17.
[55] Igor Torbakov, "Ukraine and Russia: Entangled Histories, Contested Identities and a War of Narratives," in *Revolution and War in Contemporary Ukraine. The Challenge of Change*, edited by Olga Bertelsen (Stuttgart: Verlag, 2016), 90.

Chapter 2 – The Maidan Revolution

A) The Ukrainian Crisis

The focal point that has led scholars to apply the postcolonial frame to Ukraine is the Maidan revolution[56], which took place in 2013-2014. During the year 2013, former President Victor Yanukovych maintained hopes of closer integration on both sides of the country: in the East, by assuring Russia of closer economic ties and, in the West, by promising to sign an association agreement with the European Union (EU). When he performed an unexpected volte-face towards the former in November, thousands of Ukrainians started to gather on the Maidan square (Independence square) on the 21st. This would mark the beginning of a three months long period of protests, which attracted great international attention and triggered harsh repressions causing the death of more than a hundred Ukrainian citizens and several members of the security forces. Although the main cause of what is now called the Maidan revolution was Yanukovich's refusal to sign the association agreement with the EU, the demonstrators rapidly found themselves protesting against the authorities as well as years of corruption and anti-democratic behaviour. On February 23rd, Yanukovych fled to Russia and so was overthrown. In the aftermath of these events, Russian paramilitaries known as 'polite people' (вежливые люди), mute soldiers with no insignia, used the political chaos to seize the most important official buildings of Crimea. On March 11th, just two weeks later, the peninsula declared its independence and voiced its interest to integrate the Russian Federation. After a referendum highly criticised by the international community, Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in an act denounced as illegal by a resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. At the same time, pro-Russian protests sparked in two administrative parts of Ukraine, the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, culminating in both regions declaring their unilateral independence. From this moment onwards, the region has been ravaged by an armed conflict between pro-Russian rebels and the Ukrainian state, which, despite varying intensities, has continued ever since. Today, the active participation of Russian troops in this conflict has been proven[57]. With these two initiatives to meddle in Ukraine's state affairs, Russia has ensured itself a solid footing in its neighbour's domestic politics. It is no surprise that such an event and its wide-ranging consequences have marked the beginning of a new era in Ukrainian

[56] The protests of 2014 have received different appellations such as the "Revolution of Dignity", "Euromaidan", "the 2014 revolution" or even the "Ukrainian revolution".
[57] Taras Kuzio, "When an academic ignores inconvenient facts," *New Eastern Europe*, June 21, 2016. http://neweasterneurope.eu/2016/06/21/when-an-academic-ignores-inconvenient-facts/

history. It is not the first time that the former hegemon of the post-Soviet space has meddled in the former's republics affairs by supporting rebellions which eventually mutated into what are termed 'frozen conflicts'. However, until 2014, Ukraine, although the target of persistent hard and soft power from its neighbour since its independence, had been spared by such neo-imperialistic military endeavours.

B) Conflicting Views of the 2014 Events

The subsequent debates over the causes of the revolution, its impact and its representativity of the Ukrainian population have been heated to say the least. Commentators who followed the lines of the "Two Ukraines" paradigm have interpreted the revolution and the conflict as the evidence of a stark ethnolinguistic divide between two irreconcilable communities. Some scholars which earned their stripes studying Russia such as Orlando Figes and Richard Sakwa, respectively argued that "there is no Ukraine"[58] and that the revolution was the product of Ukrainian nationalists[59] (hence Ukrainian-speaking citizens of Western Ukraine), emphasising the little relevance of today's Ukrainian state. These scholars analyse the situation in Ukraine as the consequence of power games between Europe and Russia, as both attempt to absorb the country into their sphere of influence[60]. Naturally, the events of 2014 have, without doubt, more vividly polarised the public debate, increasing hatred on social media regarding what in one way, or another is related to Russian culture[61]. The annexation of Crimea and the Russian involvement in the conflict have prompted anti-Russian nationalistic sentiments[62] and this has, naturally, been used by politicians to launch campaigns against the Russian language in Ukraine, tells Serhii Zhadan, a well-known Ukrainian-speaking writer from Kharkiv[63]. Indeed, political elites in favour of 'Ukrainisation' have pushed the adoption of laws restricting the use of the Russian language in the public sphere such as in the administration or in the medias[64]. Such legislative initiatives

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[58] Rory Finnin, "Expect the Unexpected Nation," *CRASSH*, December 20, 2013. http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/blog/post/ukrainians-expect-the-unexpected-nation
[59] Taras Kuzio, "When an academic."
[60] Andrei Portnov, "Maidan i posle Maidana," *Ab Imperio* 3, (2014): 216.
[61] Yurii Volodarskii, "Torzhestvo Nenavisti," *TSN*, May 5, 2017. https://ru.tsn.ua/blogi/themes/politics/torzhestvo-nenavisti-853692.html
[62] Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Hybrid Reconciliation," *Eurozine*, April 8, 2016. https://www.eurozine.com/hybrid-reconciliation/
[63] Novoe Vremia. "Zhadan: U nas proiskhodit bor'ba ne za ukrainskiy yazyk, a protiv russkogo". *Novoe Vremia*, February 4, 2017. https://nv.ua/ukraine/politics/zhadan-u-nas-proishodit-borba-ne-za-ukrainskij-jazyk-a-protiv-russkogo-587361.html
[64] Marco Puleri, "Values for the Sake of the (Post-Soviet) Nation," *Southeastern Europe* 42, (2018): 358.

are supported by politicians who see the Russian language in anticolonial terms and thus, for whom, it needs to be extirpated from the country[65].

Such views constitute, as Andrei Portnov writes, a widespread commonplace among Western, Russian and even Ukrainian experts and media[66]. They are contradicted by two main critiques. Firstly, these views have, according to Taras Kuzio, ignored the large involvement of Russian-speakers on the Maidan square and in the volunteer battalions at the forefront of the fight against the separatist rebels in the East[67]. Yaroslav Hrytsak sarcastically notices the amazement of some Western media when they realised that soldiers of the Ukrainian forces were communicating in Russian of high quality when fighting for the control of the airport of Donetsk[68]. These scenes defied the expectations of a traditional struggle between two languages and predetermined schemes of post-Soviet confrontation. More generally, scholars who conducted field research on Ukrainian identity have discovered that, "for most people, a stronger Ukrainian identity does not mean a worse attitude toward Russian; speaking and/or liking the Russian language has not become generally perceived as incompatible with being Ukrainian, even among those who speak mainly Ukrainian themselves"[69]. Furthermore, since 2014, there has been an increase of the population's acceptance towards Russian-speakers due to their involvement in the revolution and the war[70]. If parts of the population were either indifferent to the revolution or hostile to it, fearing that it might threaten the old bonds with Russia which are dear to them, the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in the East have largely contributed to create a rally-around-the-flag effect[71].

Secondly, Rory Finnin, observes that insisting on the weak identity of Ukraine is "analytically useless" as it only led to predict more weakness and failed to foresee the three revolutions which occurred in the country in 1990, 2004 and 2014[72]. In addition, the arguments of the "spheres of interests" fails to conceive Ukraine as a subject of its own history instead of a toy to be manipulated between great

[65] Puleri, "Values," 358.
[66] Andrei Portnov, "Maidan," 213.
[67] Taras Kuzio, "When an academic."
[68] Hrytsak, "The Postcolonial," 737.
[69] Volodymyr Kulyk, "One Nation, Two Languages? National Identity and Language Policy in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine," *PONARS Eurasia Memo*, no. 389 (September 2015): 4-5.
[70] BusinessUkraine, "Russian Language in Ukraine."
[71] Zhurzhenko, "From Borderlands,".
[72] Finnin, "Expect"; The Granite revolution, the Orange revolution and the revolution of Dignity.

powers[73]. Focusing on the interests of Russia and the EU prevents analysts to grasp the internal phenomena taking place in Ukraine. Andrei Portnov prolongs:

> "Трагические события последнего года для многих открыли неожиданные истины: русскоязычие в Украине отнюдь не тождественно пророссийскости; европейский миф Украины вовсе не "навязан Европой и США"; военный конфликт необязательно имеет исторические или этнические корни; специфическая *постсоветская гибридность* не только препятствие для идеализируемой гомогенности, но и полноправный субъект социально-политического процесса"[74].

Scholars are supporting the advent of a new analytical model to understand the developments of the country and its deeply enrooted complexities. Calling for such a reform in the field of area studies, Finnin writes**:** "If we take a step back and conceive of 'national identity' thinly as a physics of belonging that coheres a country beyond any one language, or any one ethnicity, or any one faith, or even any one historical experience, then Ukraine's national identity may be one of the most influential and underestimated sociocultural phenomena of its kind in modern European history"[75].

Chapter 3 – Postcolonial Revolution and Hybridity

A) The Maidan – a Postcolonial Revolution?

The scholars who draw on the postcolonial concepts to study Ukraine tend to follow the latter views. Instead of considering the revolution in the context of the geopolitical struggle between foreign powers, they strive to define the nature of the phenomenon by searching "within the community"[76], in Ukraine itself. This is exactly what Ilya Gerasimov, as well as other scholars writing for the journal *Ab Imperio*, is doing when attempting to define the nature of the revolution and the conflict in the East. He provides an analysis of different analytical models and attempts to find the most suitable

[73] Finnin, "Expect."
[74] Portnov, "Maidan i Posle Maidana."; "The tragic events of last year have, for a lot of people, unveiled unexpected truths: being Russophone is by no means identical as being pro-Russian; the European myth of Ukraine is absolutely not "imposed by Europe or the United States"; the military conflict has not necessarily historical and ethnic roots; the specific post-Soviet hybridity is, beyond an obstacle for an idealised homogeneity, a legitimate agent of a socio-political process".
[75] Finnin, "Expect."
[76] Ilya Gerasimov and Marina Mogilner, "Deconstructing Integration: Ukraine's Postcolonial Subjectivity," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 720.

one. Primarily, he notes, it is important to put aside the concept of 'civil war'. The two 'camps', the protesters and supporters of the Maidan revolution versus the separatist rebels, are not fighting for the same objective as the former wants to impose its own truth and gain control of the country while the latter aims to be part of the Russian Federation[77]. Indeed, it is hardly arguable that we witness in today's Ukraine a conflict similar to the fratricide bloodbath that was the Russian revolution and the subsequent civil war. Another argument underlines the fact that the Russian involvement in the conflict refutes the civil war qualification as it gives an international dimension to the conflict and such appellation allows Russia to minimize its implication[78]. Furthermore, Gerasimov discards the appellation of 'anticolonial uprising'. It would wrongly presume that Ukraine was, despite the fact that it was independent since 1991, under the imperial yoke of Russia up to 2014[79]. If Ukraine was indeed subject to various economic and political pressures, it was not subjugated by a power which denied its existence as an independent state. Ultimately, the concept of 'colour revolution' cannot apply either as it constitutes a metaphor for the removal of Soviet style rulers than a true analytical frame and thus, cannot provide an adequate model to grasp the nature of the events[80].

In the absence of a model which would perfectly fit this phenomenon, Gerasimov dares to call it a 'postcolonial revolution'. In line with the opinion of the Ukrainian historian, Yaroslav Hrytsak, he claims that the Euromaidan overcame the politics of identity by shifting the focus away from issues such as language and ethnicity, which relate more to national and anticolonial movements of the 20th century[81]. Such claim is drawn on the recent academic literature on self-perceived identities in Ukraine which noticed a significant shift among the population from an ethnolinguistic to a civic conception. Specifically investigating the conception of the Ukrainian identity in 2014, Volodymyr Kulyk finds that the participants of the revolution are defending a version of identity based on free adherence, a sense of belonging[82]. Marko Pavlyshyn confirms Kulyk's findings and adds that it spread among the

[77] Ilya Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum," *Ab Imperio* 3, (2014): 23.
[78] Wals, Tobias. "Don't call the war in Donbas a 'civil war'," *RaamopRusland*, May 22, 2019. https://raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/oekraine/1292-don-t-call-the-conflict-in-the-donbas-a-civil-war?fbclid=IwAR2tpHavDQFfoZXQCOPdncLwXaA7RUA1Bfek9Y0kXJ5lCzUsBWdjAr-3wks
[79] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 25.
[80] *Ibid*, 27.
[81] *Ibid*, 28.
[82] Kulyk, "National identity," 589.

population of the country in general and was already, although timidly, apparent during the Orange revolution in 2004[83]. Moreover, Gerasimov argues:

> "the Ukrainian revolution is postcolonial because it not only set out to overthrow the political and economy hegemony of a tyrant (foreign or domestic) but also released the forces of societal self-organization. Even more: the public agenda of revolution and, particularly, of the postrevolutionary period, has been defined predominantly by the citizens of Ukraine and on their terms, not by Yanukovych or Putin (…)"[84].

The promotion of closer ties with the EU was a consequence of the Maidan revolution more than its cause and this leads Gerasimov and Mogilner to conclude that Ukraine designed its own agenda escaping "historical scenarios" proposed by the EU and Russia[85]. In other words, the fact that the Ukrainians redefined their identity independently from any foreign pre-set frame makes the revolution a postcolonial phenomenon. An anticolonial uprising or national liberation movement would have sparked in response to a foreign rule and this is not the case of Ukraine in 2014 which has been dealing with itself. Ultimately, it is postcolonial in that the already existing Ukrainian national identity/subjectivity recreated itself from the bottom[86]. The Maidan revolution is the emergence of a new national identity in a country that has already experienced its national liberation or anticolonial (or imperial/Soviet) uprising.

B) Ukraine and the New Hybridity

When it comes to analyse this postcolonial revolution, the main concept of postcolonial theory that has been integrated by these scholars is 'hybridity': "the [conscious and unconscious] juxtaposition of two cultural traditions' and the 'process of inter-reference' between those traditions"[87]. This concept had been developed in the context of postcolonialism by the Indian English scholar, Homi Bhabha, in 1994, with regard to the British rule in India. In his book, *The Location of Culture*, he uses this term to describe "dual consciousness of writers in colonised cultures"[88]. With regard to Ukraine, the

[83] Pavlyshyn, "Literary History," 76.
[84] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 29.
[85] Ilya Gerasimov and Marina Mogilner. "Deconstructing," 721.
[86] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 23.
[87] M. M. J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory', in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James. Clifford and Georges. E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 200-201 cited in Anna Fournier (2002) "Mapping Identities: Russian Resistance to Linguistic Ukrainisation in Central and Eastern Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 3 (May 2002): 417.
[88] Zaharchenko, *Where Currents Meet*, 72.

concept of hybridity has been commonly used to approach the cultural and linguistic Russian presence and how it affects the populations and the writers who have this double identity. Drawing on the works of Homi Bhabha and Anjali Prabhu, Marco Puleri defines three essential characteristics of the new Ukrainian hybridity. First, Ukraine's postcolonial hybridity defines itself by the spontaneous revolutionary social change that it brought[89]. Second, it is characterised by the practices of dis-identification performed by the 'Maidanites' which creates an in-between space outside of pre-determined frames[90]. Gerasimov and Mogilner add that it forms "a completely new political community that cannot rely on any pre-existing 'national' structures to sustain itself"[91]. Such community is empowered with the ability to challenge hegemonic discourses linked to nationalism[92]. Finally, the Ukrainian hybridity is 'deterritorialised' as it transforms Russian in a supranational language which does not belong solely to Russia anymore[93].

Regarding the first characteristic, the Maidan revolution constitutes this spontaneous change which has significantly reshaped Ukrainian society. Initiated from the bottom, it is primarily the citizens of Ukraine who have overthrown Yanukovych and redefined the agenda of their country without the help of the elites[94]. Furthermore, the proponents of the Maidan revolution have begun promoting their hybrid identity and dis-identifying themselves from "preset fixed identities and national roles"[95]. For example, Gerasimov notes the "overwhelming role of new Russian-language and culturally Russian Ukrainian patriotism and nationalism"[96] in the Maidan protests and in the events, which occurred in its aftermath. Numerous famous personalities of the revolution, journalists, volunteers, soldiers were Russian-speakers and were followed on social medias by Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking web-users[97]. In the same vein, an extensive amount of the witnesses appearing in the famous Netflix documentary entitled "Winter on fire", retracing the main events of the revolution, speak Russian and this fact did not seem to shock anyone. More importantly, the Russian-speakers who supported the revolution were conscious of their affiliation to Russian culture but, at the same

[89] Puleri, "Hybridity," 265.
[90] *Ibid*, 266.
[91] Gerasimov and Mogilner, "Deconstructing," 720.
[92] Ilya Gerasimov "Ukraine's postcolonial revolution and counterrevolution," *Academia.edu*, accessed June 15, 2019, 10. https://www.academia.edu/25025782/Ukraines_Postcolonial_Revolution_and_Counterrevolution?auto=download
[93] Puleri, "Hybridity," 266.
[94] Aleksandr Osipyan, "Ukraina vse zhe Obrela Sobstvennoye Litso." *Ab Imperio* 3, (2014): 180.
[95] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 30.
[96] *Ibid*, 32.
[97] *Ibid*, 33.

time, adamantly embraced their belonging to the Ukrainian "nation"[98]. The sentence "I am a Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationalist"[99] demonstrates perfectly this new phenomenon. In a similar fashion, Maksim Butchenko, a Russian-speaking journalist for *Novoye Vremya*, a Ukrainian magazine published in Russian, assures that being a Russian-speaking Ukrainian is not contradictory with the revival of Ukrainian culture and language which occurs in post-Maidan Ukraine[100]. Ukrainian scholars such as Aleksandr Osipyan and Andrei Portnov also reach the same conclusion. The revolution has consecrated a new identity, which is not based on ethnicity, language or even culture but rather on social and civic components[101]. Thus, this new political community is the in-between space or "third space of enunciation"[102] underlined by Puleri. Their subjectivity is expressed in ways that are different from the more classic divisions of the 20th century along ethnic and linguistic lines and their reproductions in the "two Ukraines" theory. Being a Russian-speaker does not equate anymore to incarnating the Soviet legacy and the erstwhile Russian domination. I will show in this thesis how the promotion of preset frames can also emerge, not only from Russia, but from Ukraine itself. Lastly, by consecrating the fact that Russian-speakers can belong to Ukrainian culture, it dispossesses Russia of the monopoly of the Russian language. Russian starts to belong to Ukraine the same way French belongs to Belgium, Quebec or the former French colonies such as Algeria or Lebanon which count a large amount of writers who write in the "coloniser's language".

According to Gerasimov, Homi Bhabha did not conceive the concept of hybridity as capable of deploying its own subjectivity[103]. Instead, it illustrated the heartache of citizens, prisoners of their double roots, incompatible with the nation-building projects at work in their country. On the contrary, witnessing the emergence of Ukraine's new subjectivity since the revolution, Gerasimov and Mogilner promote the "positive valorization" of the concept[104]. Hybridity allows the creation of a new identity which contains a subversive potential permitting to confront hegemonic discourses as well as identity politics[105] created by a "protracted and painful imperial disintegration"[106] in the slipstream of the collapse of the USSR and revived during the events of 2014. In this light, the Kremlin's visions such

[98] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 33.
[99] Kulyk, "National Identity," 604.
[100] Interview with the author in Kyiv, March 2019.
[101] Osipyan, "Ukraina," 180; Portnov, "Maidan," 213.
[102] Puleri, "Hybridity," 266.
[103] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 35.
[104] Andrei Kunichika, "Hybridity: A Comment," *Ab Imperio* 1, (2016): 173.
[105] Puleri, "Hybridity," 268; Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 36.
[106] Torbakov, "Ukraine and Russia," 90.

as the one considering Russian speakers to be part of the "Русский мир" (the Russian world) and thus, whose lives are of the responsibility of Russia, can be defeated. Postcolonial paradigms are readapted to fit the post-Soviet context, confirming Finnin's opinion that there is a need for a model that does not rest purely on the ethnic and linguistic specificities of Ukraine[107]. More generally, Cédric Gras, a French writer-adventurer who created a French Alliance in Donetsk, argues that it might be time to stop calling Central Asia, the 'ex-USSR', 'post-Soviet' as the region has since then lived its own life[108]. Perhaps, the time has come to do the same for Ukraine. It might be that the postcolonial frame is not perfectly suited to fully grasp the dynamics of this part of the world, but at least, it provides an alternative that permits to understand some of its unexpected and complex mechanisms. In the next part of this thesis, I will use the three characteristics of Ukraine's new hybridity, the revolution as social change, practices of dis-identification and the deterritorialisation of Russian, as a reading grid when approaching Andrei Kurkov's non-fictional account of the revolution and his interventions in the public sphere.

Part II – Kurkov as Postcolonial Writer

Chapter 1 – The Engaged Writer

Andrei Kurkov can be seen as a pure product of the Soviet Union's legacy. Born near Leningrad in 1961, he later moved to Ukraine due to his father's professional occupation and graduated from the Kiev Foreign Languages Institute. When he reached the age for mandatory military service, his knowledge of several foreign languages, including the ability to translate from Japanese, led the authorities to assign him to the KGB, the Soviet secret services. Unwilling to integrate into this (in)famous state institution, he managed to change his affectation and serve as a prison guard in Odessa, on the shores of the Black Sea. It is during this period that he began to write, focusing mostly on children stories. After struggling with the difficulties any aspiring writer faces, he reached fame with his first novel, *Death and the Penguin* (1996). Over the years, Kurkov has managed to reach national and international fame by publishing an extensive number of books, some of them translated in more than 30 languages. These have included children stories, articles and TV-scripts. He is now the

[107] Finnin, "Expect."
[108] "Cédric Gras : « Saisons du voyage », les mémoires d'un écrivain-voyageur", La Grande Librairie, accessed on June 26, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjCBLqO-NmI

president of the Ukrainian branch of the PEN club, an international organisation defending writers' rights and freedom of expression. He is also a knight of the French Legion of Honour, a reward granted by the French President to persons who accomplished great deeds. Unsurprisingly, his opinions are regularly sought by Western TV-channels and newspapers. Kurkov's life is straddled on two radically different systems of society, which gives him a powerful vantage point from which to be an astute commentator, not only of his country's life but also of the fate of Europe. Called a "strange Ukrainian"[109], he speaks and writes in Russian, the lingua franca of the post-Soviet space and the language of the former centre of the Soviet empire, while being proud of his Ukrainian nationality and expressing himself in Ukrainian with great ease.

One could argue that, among writers, two families coexist. The first family creates literature for the sake of its beauty, as a form of art, and do not, or only seldomly, care about the power of it or its social impact. The second one groups writers who attribute a function to literature and who are interested in tackling issues they deem relevant for their society and their readers. Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov was a strong supporter of the first family. Dismissing critics with a certain panache, he claimed that, if a writer wishes to write about the aesthetics of ladies' dressing in 18th century Russia, it was his inalienable right. Likewise, a writer can decide not to focus on social and political issues as literature is not inherently about them. Although he never specifically gave his opinion on this topic, Andrei Kurkov can, given his writings, be placed firmly in the second category. In his own words, his books are always in one way or another political and tackle concrete issues such as the post-Soviet transition, Europe's economic and political integration or the current war in Donbass[110]. More specifically, *The Good Angel of Death* tackles the individualistic social relations which have ruled since the fall of the USSR and the *President's Last Love* deals with the Russian-Ukrainian relations, political elites and the remnants of the Soviet Union's ideology and memory[111]. His first and most acclaimed book (to his own amazement), *Death and the Penguin*, provides a Kafkaesque vision of post-Soviet Ukrainian society with the characters being embedded in absurdity and paranoia and a social satire depicting the brutal debacle of a country opening to capitalism[112].

[109] Irina Averianova, "Andrey Kurkov: Ukraine Diaries : Dispatches from Kiev," *NUCB Journal of Economics and Information Science* 60, no. 2 (March 2016): 175.
[110] Interview with the author in Kyiv, March 2019.
[111] Sally Dalton-Brown "Laughter of the Lost: Andrei Kurkov's Comedies of Displacement," *SLOVO* 22, no. 2 (Autumn, 2010): 106.
[112] Aroles, Clegg and Granter, "Death and the Penguin," 108.

According to Sally Dalton-Brown, one of the few scholars who studied him, Kurkov uses the aesthetics of Gogolian situational comedy and magic realism[113]. Among Ukrainian and Russian writers, numerous resorted to this literary genre to attempt to process "the legacies of colonialism and totalitarianism in contemporary Ukraine, manifested both as collective national psychic trauma and as an ontological crisis"[114]. Emphasising the surrealist positions in which his characters are found, Kurkov writes about the ideological void, the moral relativism and the collective trauma subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet Union and its all-encompassing societal paradigm[115]. If Kurkov sometimes suffers from a lack of recognition, it might be that his direct and simple writing style contrasts with the usual standards of literature in Russian[116]. However, his books are considered to be thoughtful contributions to the understanding of the world around him. Interestingly, Aroles, Clegg and Granter have shown that *Death and the Penguin* offers an interesting take on crime organisations and how, more generally, isolation of workers in organisations is caused by flexibility and decentralisation[117]. More importantly, the main substance of his writings is drawn from the sense of displacement caused by the transformation from an imperial structure to national entities and the search of new maps in a reality where ancient identities are fading [118].

Engaged in the field of literature, Kurkov is equally involved in the public debate. Already a long-time commentator of his country's political and societal issues, the Maidan revolution and the subsequent events gave him the opportunity to be even more vocal in promoting his vision of his country's future. He published his diary of the revolution and, through this, reinforced his stature of a writer who is going beyond the realm of fiction. Kurkov is also very active on social media, on which, among other things, he gives his opinion on political developments in Russian or in Ukrainian. For example, he regularly advocates for the release of Oleg Sentsov[119] and participates in public actions and protests. His claim that Ukraine should appropriate the Russian language as a cultural specificity which has attracted him threats and harassment from both Ukrainian and Russian nationalists, inevitably puts him in the category of bold and vocal writers. According to himself, he is the only Russian-speaking

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[113] Dalton-Brown, "Laughter," 104.
[114] Vitaly Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 205 in Puleri, "Self-Identification," 372.
[115] Dalton-Brown, "Laughter," 104.
[116] *Ibid*, 104.
[117] Aroles, Clegg and Granter, "Death and the Penguin," 113.
[118] Dalton-Brown, "Laughter," 105, 115; Puleri, "Self-Identification," 368, 378.
[119] Oleg Sentsov (1976) is a Ukrainian film director born in Crimea. After the annexation of the peninsula by Russian forces, he was arrested on the ground of alleged terrorist activities. After a trial denounced as fabricated by international NGOs, he was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment which he is now serving in Northern Russia.

writer to propose such idea[120]. In the following sections, I will focus on his engagement in the public sphere and in his non-fictional literary works. When analysing his proposal to deterritorialise the Russian language, I will also present the main opposition towards such project within Ukrainian society.

Chapter 2 – The Writer and the Whirlwind of History

Before delving into the relationship between Kurkov and the new Ukrainian hybridity, it is paramount to analyse from where Kurkov writes. Living very close to the Maidan square, he could not avoid this outburst of violence which seemed to him decisive for his country. In the process of writing a new book, he realised that he was incapable of doing anything else than focusing on the events taking place in front of him[121]. Instead, he wrote a diary entitled, *Dnevnik Maidana i Voina*[122], in order to offer a daily account of the revolution. Very early, Kurkov begins by giving us a first evidence of his dedication to his country's fate:

> "Я теперь понимаю намного лучше, почему в школные годы я предпочитал читать не учебники истории, а дневники писателей и политических деятелей, оказывавшихся в центре исторических событий. До сих пор помнию дневник великого русского поэта Александра Блока за 1917-1918 годы, помнию хорошо дневник Франца Кафки и особенно недавно прочитаную полную версию дневника великого украинского кинорежиссера Довженко"[123].

In Kurkov's words, historical events are impossibly difficult to grasp and eventually end up on a few pages in school textbooks[124]. Moreover, they can also be used in a way that pleases the ones publishing them or having an interest in their publication. Therefore, writing a journal is a way to give the readers a faithful picture of the "whirlwind of history" (Исторический водоворот)[125]. This excerpt taken

[120] Interview with the author in Kyiv, March 2019.
[121] Andrei Kurkov, *Dnevnik Maidana i Voina* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2018), 62.
[122] "Diary of Maidan and the War".
[123] Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 3; "Now, I understand much better why, during the school years, I preferred to read, not the history textbooks, but the journals of writers and political figures who found themselves at the centre of historical events. To this day, I remember the journal of the great Russian poet Aleksander Blok for the years 1917-1918, I remember well the journal of Franz Kafka and especially recently I finished the full version of the journal of the great Ukrainian film director, Dovzhenko".
[124] Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 3.
[125] *Ibid*, 4.

from the introduction of his journal is fundamental as it allows the readers to understand how Kurkov, by aligning himself with these three prestigious forefathers, Aleksander Blok, Franz Kafka and Aleksander Dovzhenko, frames his position as a writer through two main dimensions: the role and the heritage of the writer.

A) The Role of the Writer

> "Я не уезжаю. Не прячусь от реальности. Я в ней живу каждый день. И эту жизнь я почти ежедневно записывал, чтобы сейчас попробовать рассказать о ней вам подробно, в деталях. Жизнь во время революции, жизнь в ожидании войны, войны, которая и сейчас, когда я пишу эти сроки, кажется очень близко, намного ближе, чем казалась даже неделю назад"[126].

Further in the introduction, Kurkov specifies how he feels regarding the dramatic events taking place in front of him. The writer rises with the responsibility not to escape and to be the keeper of his country's memory. From the very beginning, Kurkov places himself in the position of such writer who is entrusted with the duty to tell others about the events he witnesses.

This echoes the dark, tragic and superb poem of Aleksander Blok (1880-1921), *Those born in obscure years* (1914), which illustrates perfectly his idea of the role of the writer (or the poet) and begins in this way:

> "Рожденные в года глухие
> Пути не помнят своего.
> Мы, дети страшных лет России,
> Забыть не в силах ничего"[127].

This poem opposes a generation born in 'empty' years[128] and a generation which, having faced "Russia's frightful years", does not have the possibility to escape its fate. A generation which must live by Blok's haunting declaratory promise "cannot forget a thing". The fact that Blok wrote this poem

[126] *Ibid*, 4; "I don't go away. I am not hiding from reality. I live in it every day. And this life, I almost every day write about it, in order now to attempt to closely recount it to you, in details. A life in the middle of a revolution, a life in the anticipation of war, a war which now, as I write these lines, seems very close, much closer than even a week before".
[127] "Those born in obscure times, Do not remember their way. We, children of Russia's frightful years, Cannot forget a thing." Translated by A. Wachtel, I. Kutik and M. Denner on: https://ruverses.com/alexander-blok/those-born-in-obscure-years/
[128] Глухой can be translated by deaf, desolate, dull or blank and thus, contains a sense of emptiness.

implies that the existence of these memories forces the writer to pass them on to the next generation. Therefore, the writer, or the poet, is the transmitter of history to the benefit of future generations which might face violence and death in the future.

In addition to the transmission of memories, the writer also warns the next generations about the perils of war. Continuing Blok's poem:

> "Испепеляющие годы!
> Безумья ль в вас, надежды ль весть?
> От дней войны, от дней свободы —
> Кровавый отсвет в лицах есть"[129].

This ominous message depicts the two sides of the coin. On the one hand, a war brings the promise of hope and freedom. On the other, it carries with it madness and fire, while the faces of the souls involved will be marked with blood. Over the course of his journal, Kurkov reflects on several occurrences on the potential and unpredictable drifts of the Maidan revolution, emphasising the unknown mist at the end of the revolutionary path and the imminence of the war.

Furthermore, Blok was a Russian poet who was part of the Silver age, a generation considered gifted with outstanding creativity and talent[130]. He was a first-hand witness of the First World War, the Russian revolution and the civil war, historical cataclysms which all contributed to wipe the old order to establish the new. Blok shared, with a few poets and writers of his generation such as Boris Pilnyak and Andrei Belyi, a paradoxical vision of the Russian revolution, oscillating between the praise of the Russia's rebirth through the revolutionary bloodbath and the fear of its collapse in blind Asian violence and decay[131]. More specifically, Pilnyak and Blok shared the obsession for the metaphor of the "snowstorm" (*metel'*) to describe the revolution as a natural and inescapable tide which would erase everything[132]. By referring to Blok, Kurkov underlines the profoundly important nature of what happens in front of his eyes. Addressing a non-Ukrainian audience, Kurkov warns at the end of the

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[129] "Incinerating years! Do you bring tidings of madness or of hope? The days of war, the days of freedom, Have left a bloody sheen on our faces". Translated by A. Wachtel, I. Kutik and M. Denner on: https://ruverses.com/alexander-blok/those-born-in-obscure-years/330/

[130] Victor Erlich, *Modernism and Revolution. Russian Literature in Transition*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 133.

[131] On this topic, I recommend the thoughtful essay of Georges Nivat in which he analyses several of these writers: "Du « Panmongolisme » au « Mouvement Eurasien »." *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 7, no. 3 (1966), 460-478.

[132] Erlich, *Modernism*, 138 ; Nivat, "Du Panmongolisme," 470; Philip Maloney, "Anarchism and Bolshevism in the Works of Boris Pilnyak," *The Russian Review* 32, no. 1 (January 1973): 45. Another poem written by Blok, *The Twelve*, depicts 12 Red guards in Petrograd and the metaphor of the snowstorm plays a fundamental role in the text.

English version of his journal that "the good old Ukraine we have lived in for twenty-three years since she gained independence will no longer exist"[133]. For better or for worse, the writer has embarked on the train of history.

Kafka's major contribution to the 20th century literature meanwhile tells us about social relations and a society which people cannot understand anymore since the advent of modern times. This narrative fits in some ways Kurkov's own books which contain surrealist scenes exemplifying the void subsequent to the collapse of the Soviet world[134]. Aleksander Dovzhenko was an early Soviet film director who was of Ukrainian origin. As Kurkov explains, in his diary he used to falsely criticise both the Jews and Ukrainians while lauding Stalin in order to ensure the KGB did not suspect him of distrust towards the Soviet system[135]. Dovzhenko's example serves to illustrate another facet of the writer's role, the resistance against the Soviet Orwellian system, or any regime which displays totalitarian features.

B) The Heritage of the Writer

Regarding the roots of the writer, referring to these specific literary forefathers is far from an innocent choice. Kurkov decides to place himself in the lineage of these personalities who incarnate the three main pillars of the complex and unresolved Ukrainian identity.

Firstly, born in Saint-Petersburg, Blok incarnates the Russian side of Ukraine's history. The country had been part of the Russian empire and as explained above, has a highly symbolical place in the Russian historical psyche. The two countries are inextricably connected in a way that either's history could not be told without reference to the other. Let us recall the claim of Yaroslav Hrytsak about the alleged postcolonial status of Ukraine: "Within the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, Ukraine was more core than colony"[136]. Kurkov is emphasising on the Russian roots of Ukraine as well as on his own as he was born in the same city as Blok and speaks Russian.

Secondly, the main interest in citing Kafka lies in his personal situation more than in his books. Indeed, he embodies another root of Ukraine as he was a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian empire. From the first partition of Poland in 1772 until the end of the first World War, the Central European empire

133 Andrei Kurkov, *Ukraine Diaries, Dispatches from Kiev* (London: Harvill Secker, 2014), 244.
134 Salton-Brown 105, 115; Aroles, Clegg and Granter, "*Death and the Penguin*," 108.
135 Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 3-4.
136 Hrytsak, "The postcolonial," 733.

occupied parts of contemporary Ukrainian territories and naturally left its mark on the culture and the identity of the region. For example, the city of Lviv distinguishes itself in today's Ukraine by its architecture influenced by Austrian culture. It constitutes the most Western part of Ukraine's identity connected to the Mitteleuropa and its culture.

Franz Kafka was a pure product of the empire he lived in, which enmeshed numerous different languages and ethnicities. Despite the fact that he was born in Prague, his mother tongue was German and so was part of the German-speaking minority of the Czech territories. Throughout his life, he wrote in this language as it was the vehicular language in the empire. Furthermore, being an Ashkenazi Jew, Kafka was familiar with Yiddish and this added another layer to his already complex identity. This situation led the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to erect him as a paragon of the concept of 'minor literature'[137]. Developed in the context of the decolonisation process, this minor literature is defined by three characteristics: it is written in a deterritorialised language, it is inherently political, and always takes a collective form[138]. Kafka's German, influenced by Yiddish and Czech is not equivalent to the one used at the centre of the empire, Vienna. It is political because it constantly reminds the minority that its language is separated from the "primitive Czech territoriality"[139]. Finally, such literature is "characterised by an implicit and anxious questioning of the terms of collective identification"[140]. As this type of literature is the result of imperial constructs, whether Austro-Hungarian, Russian or Soviet, the concept has been applied by scholars to study Ukrainian literature in Russian. Russian-speaking Ukrainian writers write in the language of the former dominant power, are inevitably in the realm of politics as they constitute a minority and their productions reveal the identity crisis and the feeling of displacement of a collectivity[141]. Contemporary Russophone Ukrainian writers such as Aleksey Nikitin, Volodymyr Rafeenko and Andrei Kurkov express this crisis in their books by inserting narratives of displacement and distortions of former hegemonic narratives[142]. Such questioning seems to be a fundamental component of these writers' DNA as they express both in their books and publics interventions, their difficulty to come to terms with the identity crisis caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Kurkov's choice to cite Kafka therefore seems highly

[137] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Vers une littérature mineure?* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1975).
[138] *Ibid*, 29-30.
[139] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 30.
[140] Paul Delaney, "Decolonization and the Minor Writer," *Postcolonial forum. Kent University*. (Accessed January 11, 2019), 1. https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/15776034/decolonization-and-the-minor-writer-paul-delaney-in-their-critical-
[141] Puleri, "Self-Identification," 378, 382-383.
[142] *Ibid*, 368-378.

relevant as he wants to insist on how empires affect the identity of displaced ethnic and linguistic groups surviving them.

Finally, Aleksander Dovzhenko represents, with his Ukrainian surname, the Ukrainian part of the country. He constitutes the bridge between the foreign powers which influenced Ukraine's history. It is interesting to note that the selection of these three personalities is strikingly similar to a situation depicted in *The Moscoviad* (1993), a book written by the Ukrainian-speaking writer Iurii Andrukhovich. Taking place in Moscow, the former centre of the empire[143], four persons, each representing a side of Ukraine's history, discuss and attempt to identify the features of their identity. In the introduction of his journal, Kurkov seemingly reconstitutes this dialogue by reproducing the group's composition: a Ukrainian, Dovzhenko, a Russian, Blok, a Jew, Kafka and finally, a Russian-speaking Ukrainian, himself, the only one who is unable to specify his identity. In the light of this story, Puleri refers to the Russian speaker as the "missing voice"[144] and this seems to have been the situation for Russian-speaking Ukrainians until Maidan as Gerasimov's claim implies. Kurkov's connection of these three writers could be interpreted as an implicit reference to Andrukhovich's work and vision of Ukraine. In a conference given at the University of Oslo in 2018, he stated that, at the time of the Maidan revolution, the country was not split along ethnic and linguistic lines, as Western commentators promptly claimed at the time[145]. Andrukhovych is part of these Ukrainian writers who do not necessarily believe in a fixed national idea and recognises the multiples facets of Ukraine's identity. Kurkov makes a parallel with Andrukhovich's implicit critic of the "Two Ukraines Myth" and allows the readers to have a first glimpse of his stance regarding the topic. As I have shown, Kurkov uses the introduction of his journal to tell the readers how the whirlwind of history defines the role of writers and constructs their heritage.

[143] Puleri, "Self-I," 368.
[144] *Ibid*, 369.
[145] Conversation with Iurii Andrukhovych in Oslo (Feb 2018), Oslo University, accessed August 6, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qfb48htsQw.

Chapter 3 – Kurkov and the Postcolonial Hybridity

A) Hybridity 1 - Kurkov and the Maidan Revolution

Using and readapting the postcolonial framework, Puleri finds that the Ukrainian postcolonial hybridity is "tied to revolutionary social change"[146]. This new collective identity develops when a radical break-up occurs in society through a change of political power. As explained above, the Maidan revolution brought radical change to parts of the population regarding their conception of "Ukrainianness"[147], and by achieving it in a bottom-up fashion[148]. Moreover, the change brought by the revolution is, beyond the social transformation, also part of a redefinition of the Ukraine's post-Soviet path. As Gerasimov argues, Ukraine acts as a pioneer of the former Soviet republics by exiting the phase of 'transition', the main paradigm used since the collapse of the USSR, to enter a new unknown zone in search for its collective identity without falling back to historical romanticism[149]. In other words, Maidanites and their supporters are showing less dependence on their past in defining their collective identity. As such, the objective of this section is to analyse how Andrei Kurkov relates to the first characteristic of hybridity, to the Maidan revolution and the subsequent change of paradigm considered, in the eyes of some scholars as a fundamental milestone in Ukrainian history.

Kurkov quickly embraced the revolution as it was animated by social and democratic demands. Although he entrusted himself with the duty to provide an account of the revolution, this journal is not the work of an objective historian but the contribution of an involved, and thus subjective, citizen. While Kurkov writes animated by anger and fear[150], these emotions are directed towards the authorities. His tirade describing Yanukovich as illiterate and corrupt[151] contributes to justify the revolution and the overthrow of unjust rulers. Furthermore, Kurkov draws a parallel between Saturday 30th of November 2013, the first violent repression of the so far peaceful protests, and the 'Bloody Sunday' (Кровавое воскресенье), the massacre of unarmed protestors in Saint-Petersburg on the 22th of January 1905[152]. The latter is considered a key event contributing to the advent of the revolution in 1917. In 2013, The *Berkutovtsy*, the now infamous Ukrainian riot police, attempted to remove the

146 Puleri, "Hybridity," 265.
147 Pavlyshyn, "Literary," 76.
148 Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 29.
149 Gerasimov, "Ukraine's postcolonial revolution," 2.
150 Irina Averianova, "Andrey Kurkov: Ukraine Diaries : Dispatches from Kiev," *NUCB Journal of Economics and Information Science* 60, no. 2 (March 2016): 176.
151 Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 63.
152 *Ibid*, 20-21.

crowd from Maidan square and indiscriminately hit women, students and old people. One can rightly doubt whether or not the events of 2014 and the Russian revolution are comparable regarding their historical consequences. However, the pivotal role of the former for Ukraine's history is stressed. Further, Kurkov compares these repressions with the Soviet regime and this contributes to place the Maidan revolution in perspective with the Soviet past. Words such as 'titushky'[153] and 'EuroMaidan' are linked with the famous 'Glasnost' and 'Perestroika', whose reputation stretched far beyond the borders of Russia[154]. As Gerasimov writes, the colour revolutions were more a milestone than a real liquidation of the Soviet past[155]. Therefore, in Kurkov's eyes, the Maidan revolution constitutes the awaited paradigmatic shift that might allow the Ukrainian people to bury their troubled past.

Far from being above the fray, Kurkov regularly joined the protesters to demonstrate his support for his fellow citizens. Once he clarified his role as a writer, the journal's intimate features reveal his position as citizen but more importantly, as a father who cares about the future of his country, thus of his children. Throughout the journal, he insists on the non-political nature of the protests[156]. In mid-December, he was invited by Serhii Zhadan, a prominent Ukrainian writer from Kharkiv to give a talk with other activists but he refused, feeling incapable to conceive himself as more than a witness and a citizen[157]. Kurkov also brought his share by creating, with other personalities, a fund to provide medical and legal assistance to victims of violence during the protests[158]. In the end, Andrei Kurkov not only supported the revolution and the change it brought, but also fully integrated himself into the movement.

> "Люди с генетической памятью раба мечтают стать рабовладельцами. Люди с генетической памятью свободного человека мечтают о свободе для всех."[159]

[153] Term used to describe the thugs hired by the Ukrainian authorities to beat the protesters and foster chaos among their ranks, usually taken out from prison.
[154] Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 40.
[155] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 27.
[156] Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 15-16.
[157] Kurkov, *Ukraine diaries*, 48.
[158] "Ukrainian Writers Establish Fund for Victims of Protests," Euromaidanpress, accessed August 7, 2019. http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/02/06/ukrainian-writers-establish-fund-for-victims-of-protests/
[159] Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 72; Those with the ancestral memory of slavery dream to become slave owners. The ones with the ancestral memory of a free man dream of liberty for everyone".

B) Hybridity 2 – Practices of Dis-identification and Hegemonic Discourses

1. *Ukrainskie Russkie*[160]

The collapse of the Soviet Union naturally launched a movement through which Ukrainians hoped to reconnect with their suppressed national identity and territoriality by promoting the traditional configuration of a nation: an ethnicity and a language. Such an approach was typical among countries of the post-Soviet space embracing their newly acquired freedom. The ground-breaking nature of the Maidan revolution lies in the fact that, according to the works of Kulyk and Pavlyshyn, it has triggered the emergence of a conception of the Ukrainian identity based on the sense of belonging rather than from an ethnolinguistic conception[161]. Through such radical change, the new Ukrainian hybridity distances itself from identity frames more typical of the nation-building processes of the 19th and 20th centuries consequent to the desegregation of states and empires. The Ukrainian historian, Yaroslav Hrytsak, furthers:

> "The Ukrainians of Euromaidan are preoccupied with modernization and values, whereas Putin's Russia worries about security and identities… national issues were not the only items on its [Maidan] agenda – in fact, they were not even central. Neither were, for that matter, questions of language or historical memory."[162]

At this point, it is necessary to briefly delve into some of the 'worries of Putin's Russia' regarding identity and historical memory. At the beginning of the 1990s, 25 million Russians found themselves in the newly created states outside of the Russian Federation[163]. Until 2006, "official Russian policy documents refer to the Russian diaspora as 'ethnic Russians' (*russkie*), 'Russian speakers' (*russkoiazychnie*), 'cultural Russians' (*rossiiane*), 'compatriots' (*sootechestvenniki*), 'countrymen abroad' (*zarubezhnye sootechestvenniki*) or 'fellow tribesmen' (*soplemenniki*)"[164]. This wide range of concepts testifies of the will of the Kremlin to maintain cultural and political bonds with anyone who is, one way or another, connected to Russia. The void left by the collapse of the Soviet Union has however made Russia an orphan of its former great power status and the 'compatriots' left abroad serve as a good opportunity to retain a foothold in the former republics' affairs. From 2006 onwards, Russian

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[160] Ol'ga Mikhailova, "Ukrainskie russkie," *Zhittia*, March 26, 2014. https://life.pravda.com.ua/columns/2014/03/26/160035/
[161] Kulyk, "National," 589; Pavlyshyn, "Literary," 76.
[162] Yaroslav Hrytsak, "Ignorance Is Power," *Ab Imperio* 15, no. 3 (2014): 222.
[163] Moritz Pieper, "*Russkiy Mir*: The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad," *Geopolitics*, (2018): 1.
[164] *Ibid*, 5.

authorities settled for the term 'compatriots' and orientated soft power initiatives towards this diaspora through the creation of institutions such as the 'Russkii Mir' foundation[165]. The institution's main role is to promote the Russian culture and language abroad[166]. Despite the initial official affirmation of its diverse character (i.e. integrating non-Orthodox Russian speaking populations with different ethnic backgrounds), this concept's main pillars are the Russian ethnicity and language[167]. According to Wawrzonek, the 'Russkii Mir' is a civilizational concept which surmises the existence of an Orthodox community uniting all Eastern Slavs in opposition with the West[168]. Through the promotion of this concept, Russia seeks to retain and strengthen its influence in countries of the former Soviet Union.

In 2008, Georgia, willing to regain full control of its territory, began to suppress secessionist inclinations in South-Ossetia and Abkhazia. Claiming to protect the rights of ethnic Russians living in these areas, Russia declared war on Georgia and easily defeated its troops. Since then, the Russian army has retained its presence in the region to uphold the status quo. In doing so, Russia instrumentalised its diaspora in order to justify meddling in Georgia's affairs and re-establish its position in the region[169]. In terms of Ukraine, the post-Maidan political elites clearly showed their will to pursue the Ukrainisation of their country and this served as an argument for Russia to annex Crimea, claiming to defend, this time, the rights of Russian speakers[170]. Through these actions, the Kremlin demonstrated that Ukraine's sovereignty was "negotiable"[171]. In this context, Russia uses the 'Russkii Mir' concept to appropriate the ethnic and linguistic Russian populations located on the territories of its neighbours and use them as justification for its actions. This entails insisting on the similarities and shared history of the two countries in order to preserve a common destiny. These neo-imperialistic endeavours[172] have led scholars to apply postcolonial paradigms to Ukraine and its relationship of dependency with Russia[173]. Such Russian rhetoric functions as a hegemonic discourse

[165] Pieper, "Russkiy Mir," 5, 7-8.
[166] "About Russkiy Mir Foundation." Russkiy Mir Foundation, accessed August 16, 2019, https://russkiymir.ru/en/fund/index.php
[167] Michal Wawrzonek, "Ukraine in the "Gray Zone": Between the "Russkiy Mir" and Europe," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 28, no. 4 (November 2014): 762.
[168] Wawrzonek, "Ukraine," 760; Natalia Naydenova, "*Holy Rus*: (Re)construction of Russia's Civilizational Identity," *Slavonica* 21, no. 1-2 (2016): 38.
[169] Pieper, "Russkiy Mir," 10.
[170] *Ibid*, 12.
[171] *Ibid*, 14.
[172] Wawrzonek, "Ukraine," 760.
[173] Smola and Uffelmann, *Postcolonial Slavic Literatures,* 11.

based on "preset fixed identities and national roles"[174] in order to keep Ukraine on the same common destiny as Russia.

In the context of the revolution, ethnic Russians and Russian speakers have largely shown that they were loyal to the Ukrainian state instead of the 'Russkii Mir' and by doing so, they dis-identified from their neighbour. The sentence mentioned above, "I am a Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationalist", encapsulates the whole phenomenon. Firstly, as they claim this, they are dis-identifying himself as they merge their Russian identity into the Ukrainian one. Secondly, they are creating an alternative zone of expression, or "third space of enunciation"[175], which cannot be associated with either Russia or Ukraine's traditional fixed identities. Thirdly, they challenge hegemonic discourses such as the 'Russkii Mir'. In short, they contradict the idea of a transnational Russian unity. Such practices entail self-identification from the bottom rather than imposition from above. It is this alternative group which has been termed as *Ukrainskie Russkie*[176], literally meaning, 'Ukrainian Russians', in order to describe Ukrainians with a Russian ethnic background or speaking Russian. Olg'a Mikhailova, a journalist at the *Ukrainskaya Pravda*¸ even described this phenomenon as the emergence of a new nation which defines itself on cultural grounds rather than on "the blood and the soil"[177]. The new Ukrainian hybridity is characterised by the fact that these 'Ukrainian Russians' promote their identity while showing their staunch support for the Ukrainian state. During the revolution, they used Ukrainian national symbols to express their patriotism[178].

This shift in the conception of identity is also due to the fact that, for numerous 'Ukrainians Russians', Russia has nothing to offer. As Osipyan argues, the majority of Ukrainians are not attracted by the Russian form of governing with strongman leadership, its passive population and the necessary repressive apparatus[179]. Furthermore, he adds that the former USSR does not constitute a "утраченный золотой век"[180] to which they would want to come back. In other words, Russia has failed to provide an attractive civilizational model, the 'Russkii Mir', to the 'Ukrainian Russians'[181]. In order to describe the discrepancy between the two models (Russian against Ukrainian), Gerasimov

[174] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 30.
[175] Puleri, "Hybridity," 266.
[176] Mikhailova, "Ukrainskie Russkie."
[177] *Ibid.*
[178] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 28.
[179] Osipyan, "Ukraina," 179.
[180] *Ibid*, 179; "A lost golden age".
[181] Mikhailova, "Ukrainskie Russkie."

depicts Russia as "a chicken with its head cut off running in circles (and – it is hard not to add – rattling the sabre and waving a flag)"[182].

The same practices of dis-identification spread among the ranks of Russian-speaking writers who supported the Maidan. According to Ilya Kukulin, the events of 2014 led numerous authors to firmly criticise the Russian actions and to support the pro-European, democratic and social movement that were the protests[183]. He notes that these writers are dis-identifying themselves in Russian from their neighbour[184]. Kukulin reproduces the poem of Anastasiia Dmitruk intended to Russians and entitled "We will never be brothers"[185]. Inna Bulkina, a Ukrainian literary scholar, writes that the protests gave birth to an outburst of bilingual poetry which revolved around the Maidan[186]. Clearly, they fully embrace the three characteristics of the new Ukrainian hybridity theorised by Gerasimov and Puleri. They wholeheartedly took part in the revolution, dis-identified themselves and achieved the deterritorialisation of the Russian language. Since the collapse of the USSR, Ukrainian literatures in Ukrainian and in Russian were not produced for the same literary markets. The latter has always been a sort of hybrid phenomenon which never really integrated the Ukrainian cultural field[187] and was mainly oriented towards Moscow[188]. However, the Maidan revolution has brought a radical change to the Ukrainian literary landscape. Numerous writers have decided to cut ties with Russia and started to consider themselves to be part of Ukrainian literature[189]. Boris Khersonskii, a famous Russian-speaking poet from Odessa, wrote that, despite financial difficulties and timid developments, the literary Ukrainian landscape is transforming and the literature in Russian is becoming indispensable[190]. These writers are distancing themselves from the former metropole, Moscow[191] and such movement constitutes a typical postcolonial process. Ultimately, these writers are embodying a version of the

[182] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 37.
[183] Kukulin, "The Long-Legged Time," 165.
[184] *Ibid*, 166.
[185] *Ibid*, 166.
[186] Inna Bulkina, "«Stikhiya Maydana»: russkaya i ukrainskaya «maydannaya poeziya»," *Gefter*, April 1, 2016. http://gefter.ru/archive/18008
[187] Puleri, "Self-Identification," 378-380.
[188] Khersonskii, "On the Languages."
[189] Inna Bulkina, "Russkaya literatura Ukrainy: vchera, segodnya, zavtra." *Gefter*, March 9, 2016. http://gefter.ru/archive/17745
[190] Khersonskii, "On the Languages."
[191] Bulkina, "Russkaya."

'Russkii Mir' free from imperialistic connotation and exclusive visions of 'Russianness'[192]. The words of Andrei Polyakov, Russian-speaking poet from Crimea, illustrate well the evolution of the concept:

> "Я не знаю, что такое быть русским."[193]

2. From Hybridity to a Multi-ethnic State

Andrei Kurkov, throughout his daily account of the revolution, inserts reflections on the relations between Ukraine and Russia and therefore, on identity issues. On the 9th of January 2014, in order to explain the ban of the 'Putin supporters party' and the survival of the 'Russian Unity party'[194], he writes:

> "Может, потому, что между словами «русский» и «российский» есть большая разница, которою множество украинцев не замечают. Я ведь тоже русский, этнический русский гражданин Украины. Но я не «российский», потому, что не имею никакого отношение к России, к ее политике, не имею и иметь не хочу российского гражданства."[195]

Kurkov very clearly dis-identifies himself from Russia by opposing the terms, *russkii* and *rossiiskii*. In his words, the former describes the fact of being an ethnic Russian or to speak Russian while not entailing being from Russia. The latter word concerns specifically what is connected to the country. Consequently, it is possible for him to identify as a Ukrainian citizen but retain his predominant Russian roots. His adherence towards the Ukrainian state rests on civic grounds instead of blood and soil just as Mikhailova wrote. To further this dimension of his journal, Kurkov chooses to narrate the story of an officer of the Ukrainian navy, called Emelyanenko, captain of the warship *Ternopil*, who refused to yield to Russian forces annexing Crimea, declaring in Russian: "Русские не сдаются"[196].

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[192] Mikhail Nemtsev, "Pyat' tezisov o «russkom» i o «Russkom mire»". *Gefter*, March 1, 2017. http://gefter.ru/archive/21334

[193] Gleb Morev, "Andrey Polyakov: «Ya ne znayu, chto takoye byt' russkim»," *Solta*, May 29, 2014. https://www.colta.ru/articles/literature/3386-andrey-polyakov-ya-ne-znayu-chto-takoe-byt-russkim; "I do not know what it means to be Russian".

[194] Russian Unity (*Russkoe Edinstvo*) was a political party from Crimea which advocated for the rights of Russian-speakers, closer relations between the two countries and the integration of the peninsula to the territory of the Russian Federation. The party was banned by a Ukrainian court on the 30th of April 2014 on the grounds that its leader contributed to facilitate the annexation. Its former leader, Sergey Aksyonov is now the head of the Republic of Crimea within the Russian Federation.

[195] Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 53; "Maybe because there is a big difference between the words "Russian" and "from Russia" which a plethora of Ukrainians do not discern. I am indeed also Russian. But I am not from Russia as I do not have any connection with Russia, with its politics, I do not have and do not want to have the Russian citizenship".

[196] *Ibid*, 112; "Russians do not surrender".

Indeed, half his crew and himself were ethnic Russians. Through such a statement, he voiced his unyielding support to the Ukrainian state despite his origins. By choosing this event, Kurkov stresses a model of 'Ukrainian Russians' detached from the metropole and thus, alleviated from the symbolic relations of dependence. Furthermore, he underlines the complex nature of the struggle between Russia and Ukraine, forcing ethnic and linguistic brethren to fight each other.

Kurkov, in both his private and public life, has demonstrated his support for the hybrid nature of Ukraine. In his journal, one of the scenes depicted implies that his children are learning Ukrainian, as Russian is their mother tongue[197]. This simple fact shows that Kurkov conceives of his 'Russianness' as fully compatible with his Ukrainian nationality. In the literary field, he decided, approximately around 2012, to publish his books in both languages[198] and some of his productions in Russian contain passages in Ukrainian which are not translated[199]. Not buying into the "Two Ukraines" paradigm, he strived throughout his career to collaborate with Ukrainian-speaking writers such as Iurii Vynnychuk and Serhii Zhadan[200]. The latter who was mentioned above, adamantly promotes the diverse identity of Ukraine and shares Kurkov's view that the situation of bilinguism, an interesting and complex phenomenon should be seen as an advantage rather than as a problem[201]. Andrei Kurkov, Boris Khersonskii and Ilya Rissenberg are Ukrainian writers and what matters the most, according to Zhadan, is self-identification[202]. Both writers regularly participate in literary festivals which hosts authors writing in either or both languages.

Despite the fact that Kurkov seems to be in favour of Ukrainisation, he nonetheless supports a vision of the country which recognises its diversity. On the 22nd of January 2014, died the first victims of the repression of the protests. In his journal's entry for that day, Kurkov mourned the death of Serhii Nigoyan, an "Armenian, citizen of Ukraine"[203], recognising the possibility and legitimacy of a hybrid identity. In an interview with Marco Puleri in March 2013, he declared:

> "The question of identity is a source of several arguments, and it is a question that divides the nation, rather than uniting it. Because the main problem is "what do you

[197] Kurkov, *Ukraine Diaries*, 96.
[198] Puleri, "Self-identification," 378.
[199] Uillcam Blacker, "Blurred lines: Russian literature and cultural diversity in Ukraine," *The Calvert Journal*, March 17, 2014. https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/2176/russian-culture-in-ukraine-literature
[200] *Ibid*, 375.
[201] Platon Besedin, "Vyrosshie iz shineli Gogolia i Makhno," *Svobodnaia Pressa*. May 3, 2014. http://svpressa.ru/society/article/86247/?aam=1
[202] *Ibid.*
[203] Kurkov, *Dnevnik*, 63.

> want in Ukraine: an ethnic nation or a political nation?" Logically for everybody who is not ethnically Ukrainian, we have a multicultural society, with over thirty-five nationalities: some big ones, like Russians and Tatars, and some smaller ones, like Greeks, Bulgarians, Romanians, and others. If we accept that Ukraine is a political nation, then we can go further. But before this achievement, I guess that it is difficult to talk about the national cultural context, because we have different regional cultural identities"[204].

In March 2019, he reiterated his position while postponing the advent of an eventual multi-ethnic state for at least another 40 years[205]. Kurkov prolongs Finnin's opinion who claims that there is a need to change the way scholars study Ukraine by adapting their concept of national identity[206]. The former does exactly what the latter prescribed: to focus on Ukraine's unique diverse identity rather on its fragmentations.

C) Hybridity 3 - The Deterritorialisation of the Russian Language

1. Deterritorialisation and the Maidan Revolution

The concept of the deterritorialisation of a language, was developed by Deleuze and Guattari to describe Kafka's linguistic and literary situation, an author from a minority who writes in a major language, the one of the empire's metropole. This concept has been used and adapted by scholars when they analysed the desegregation of colonial empires of the 20th century. Progressively, the concept made its way to the 'minority studies'[207]. As colonies gained freedom, numerous communities, from which writers emerged, spoke the language of the coloniser. These communities continued to use the language and their writers appropriated it. The former minorities and their minor literatures found themselves possessing the language of the former hegemon (or still 'contaminated' by it). Appropriating the language of the coloniser can allow the minority to understand the mechanisms of domination and to challenge hegemonic discourses maintaining relations of dependency[208]. The application of this postcolonial concept to the Ukrainian literature in Russian has been achieved most

[204] Puleri, "Self-identification," 378.
[205] Interview with the author in Kyiv, March 2019.
[206] Finnin, "Expect."
[207] Dirk Weissmann, "De Kafka à la théorie postcoloniale: l'invention de la littérature 'mineure'," in *Traduire, transmettre ou trahir Réflexions sur la traduction en sciences humaines*, edited by Stephanie Schwerter and Jennifer K. Dick, Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2013, 78-79.
[208] Delaney, "Decolonization," 3-5.

notably by Marco Puleri, writing for the journal *Ab Imperio*. In his thoughtful study, he analyses the way Russian-speaking Ukrainian writers such as Aleksey Nikitin, Volodymyr Rafeenko and Andrei Kurkov propose a counter-hegemonic narrative in their books in order to rethink the relation between the centre and the periphery[209]. However, the literary techniques deployed by these writers underlined a feeling of displacement[210] and estrangement regarding their condition as a minority in Ukraine.

Gerasimov's postcolonial interpretation of the Maidan revolution, supported by the researches performed by several scholars[211], underlines the change which occurred within parts of Ukrainian society regarding the abandonment of identity politics and the embracement of Ukraine's ethnic and linguistic diversity[212]. This allowed Russian speakers and ethnic Russians to embrace their Ukrainian identity and therefore, they detached the Russian language from Russia. They participate in what Puleri defines as the third characteristic of the post-Maidan Ukrainian hybridity, the deterritorialisation of the Russian language. Through this, they consecrated the fact that Russian "is not necessarily linked to a particular territory or entity and a particular ethnicity"[213]. In the postcolonial context such as developed by Gerasimov, what was seen before as a weakness, an undesired legacy of the Soviet Union, is now proudly promoted as part of the Ukrainian identity. Due to the imperial and Soviet past, the Russian language has developed its own life beyond the borders of the Russian Federation.

2. Status and Opposition

Article 10, paragraph 3 of the Ukrainian Constitution guarantees "the development, the use and the protection of Russian"[214] as well as other languages of national minorities. Despite the formal recognition, Russian has no specific status today. In 2012, a law entitled "On the principles of the state language policy" was passed amidst great public disorder and attributed a regional status to Russian allowing native speakers to use it for official purposes. In February 2018, the Constitutional court of Ukraine declared it unconstitutional. Since the Maidan revolution, the political elites have promoted what Puleri terms as an "exclusive version of history"[215] which is combined with anti-Russian sentiments caused by the events of 2014. Recent legislative developments aim to strengthen the place

[209] Puleri, "Self-identification."
[210] *Ibid*, 368.
[211] Pavlyshyn, "Literary,"; Kulyk, "National."
[212] Gerasimov, "Ukraine 2014," 29.
[213] Puleri, "Hybridity," 266.
[214] Article 10 of the Constitution of Ukraine : "В Україні гарантується вільний розвиток, використання і захист російської, інших мов національних меншин України." https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/cgi-bin/laws/main.cgi?nreg=254%EA%2F96%2D%E2%F0;
[215] Puleri, "Self-identification," 356.

of Ukrainian in the public sphere (school, media, administration, courts, etc.). In 2017, a law was passed which made Ukrainian the sole language of education with a potential exception for languages of the European Union, thus not Russian. Although the law is not yet in vigour, it fostered huge criticism for it threatens languages of minorities. These developments how that Russian is not considered a part of Ukraine's identity and does not enter in any national narrative.

Needless to say that the idea of granting any sort of status to the Russian language faces strong resistance and is deemed even by Russian-speakers to be provocative. The use of Russian is tolerated when circumscribed to the private sphere, business meetings and the carpeted halls of official buildings. However, any initiative to attribute it any sort of status in the public sphere faces staunch animosity. It is, for evident reasons, quite understandable for a country which lived most of its existence in the shadow of the greater neighbour to be willing to get rid of the latter's influence. The Russian language is still deeply present in Ukrainian society today. Numerous traditional and digital media are broadcasting in Russian[216]. Some books are only available in Russian. It remains widely spoken in the business sector, among state officials and the journalist interviewing Timothy Snyder about languages in Ukraine even dares to say that 50% of Ukrainians use Russian in everyday life[217]. Mykola Azarov, Prime-Minister under Yanukovich from 2010 to 2014, is famous for a speech in which he proved incapable to speak Ukrainian correctly. The main argument against the recognition of Russian is the use of the 'Russkii Mir' by the Kremlin and its threats on national security. In this context, the legitimisation of Russian seems to constitute a threat for the Ukrainian national identity which has finally the opportunity to thrive, liberated from the Russian domination. Furthermore, the process of Ukrainisation seem to serve as a cement to unify the Ukrainian social corps shaped by centuries of migrations and different regimes. While preserving national minorities' languages, such process would contribute to disenclave these minorities in order to strengthen the unity of the country[218].

Among the proponents of Ukrainisation, are people who deem that an independent Ukraine cannot preserve legacies of the colonial past and desire to fully extirpate the Russian language from the

[216] Andrei Holub, "Chysla pro slova. Chy hotove suspil'stvo do peretvoren' u movnii politytsi," *Tyzhden'*, May 5, 2017, http://tyzhden.ua/Society/191481 in Puleri, "Values," 358.
[217] Hromadske, "Historian Snyder."
[218] Oleksandr Sushko, "An Inclusive Ukrainian Education," *Project Syndicate*. October 3, 2017, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/ukraine-education-law-foreign-hostility-by-oleksandr-sushko-2017-10, in Puleri, "Values," 358.

country. This stream is defined by Gerasimov as a manifestation of "archaic romantic nationalism"[219]. With regard to minor literatures, this has been identified as a reactionary movement which re-articulates generic groupings[220]. As Gerasimov writes, such movement constitutes a greater threat for the success of the postcolonial revolution than the former hegemon, Russia[221]. "There is nothing unusual about this conclusion. After all, the French Revolution was subdued not by the armies of the old regimes of Russia or Prussia, but by their own leading trench coat man, Napoleon Bonaparte; the liberating potential of the Bolshevik Revolution was terminated not by General Wrangel or Admiral Kolchak, but by Comrade Stalin"[222]. On Maidan, progressive and liberal Maidanites were cohabiting with nationalists or 'Ukrainian patriots' who were animated by strong anti-Russian sentiments[223] and do not regard well the promotion of diversity of the postcolonial movement described by Gerasimov. According to Irina Podoliak, a politician pushing Ukrainisation reforms, the survival of Russian culture in Ukraine is a product of the colonial past[224]. She incarnates a movement which reflects in anticolonial terms and considers that the Ukrainian nation is defined by the Ukrainian language. In the same vein, Rostyslav Semkiv, a literary scholar from Kyiv, criticised Kurkov's bilingual literary projects "because by considering Ukrainian literature in Russian as an active element of the national culture, we strengthen the colonial dependence on Russia and its literary market"[225]. These personalities incarnate a movement which, to use the dichotomy established by Hrytsak[226], reflects in terms of fixed identities opposed to the multi-ethnic vision contained in the new Ukrainian hybridity. These visions entail different political projects and testify of the great polarisation when it comes to establish Ukraine's identity.

3. The Ukrainian Russian language

It is in this heated context that Andrei Kurkov advocates for the formal recognition of the Russian language as a Ukrainian cultural specificity. In his words, he is the only writer to propose this idea[227] which is considered by many to be a provocative stance. However, Kurkov is no pro-Putin agitator

[219] Gerasimov, "Ukraine's Postcolonial Revolution," 12.
[220] Delaney, "Decolonisation," 7.
[221] Gerasimov, "Ukraine's Postcolonial Revolution," 12.
[222] *Ibid*, 15.
[223] Denys Gorbach and Oles Petik, "Fear and loathing in Ukraine: a very "European" protest," *openDemocracy*, April 1, 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/fear-and-loathing-in-ukraine-european-kind-of-protest/ in Puleri, "Values," 362.
[224] Iryna Podoliak, "Movne bozhevillia". *Tyzhden'*, May 5, 2017.http://tyzhden.ua/Columns/50/191480
[225] Puleri, "Self-identification," 375.
[226] Hrytsak, "Ignorance," 222.
[227] Interview with the author in Kyiv, March 2019.

nor is he dreaming of a Russian-speaking Ukraine. His claim is animated by his unyielding patriotism for his country and aims at strengthening its political and social situation. Interestingly, his claim is also advocated by the American historian, Timothy Snyder, although they do not mention each other when promoting their views. In an interview given to *Hromadske*, a media broadcasting in Ukrainian, Snyder offers useful information about the eventual realisation of such initiative. According to him, Ukraine is one of the only countries in the world which has an important second language and does nothing to standardise while another one (Russia) acts as the centre of linguistic normativity[228]. Both developed their stance on the basis that allowing Russia to retain the philological control of the Russian language is giving it a weapon that it can use against Ukraine[229]. Russians-speakers of Ukraine widely watch media produced in Russia and thus, are reached by the narrative and the ideas coming from the other side of the border. As Ukraine has always refused to appropriate the Russian language, it was never officially standardised according to its own criteria. Therefore, this gives a tremendous advantage to Russia as it can easily reach Russian-speaking Ukrainians with its propaganda[230]. For Kurkov, the recognition of Russian constitutes a major geopolitical issue:

> "Украинский русский язык тоже должен стать инструментом борьбы против самодержавия и всего того, что сегодня ассоциируется с "русским миром" и российской элитой, исповедующей другую политическую религию и совсем другие ценности. Если этого не случится, то война мировоззрений автоматически превращается в войну языков. Точнее, война языков у нас идет уже не первый год потому, что украинский русский язык недостаточно наполнен украинскими и европейскими смыслами"[231].

A language is not only a mean of communication, it carries values. In this light, it has to be used to allow Ukraine to resist against the neo-imperialist endeavours of the Kremlin. In other words, enabling a war of languages to happen would mean mistaking 'Ukrainian Russians', as enemies too. Snyder adds that it can be used to underline the discrepancies between the two countries. As there is freedom of

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[228] Hromadske International, "Historian Snyder on Language, Zelenskyy and Vakarchuk," *Hromadske International*, July 7, 2019. https://en.hromadske.ua/posts/ukrainians-own-russian-but-dont-admit-it-historian-snyder
[229] Kurilenko, "Andrei Kurkov."
[230] Hromadske, "Historian Snyder."
[231] Kurilenko, "Andrei Kurkov"; "The Ukrainian Russian language must also constitute an instrument of the battle against autocracy and everything which is associated today with the "Russian world", the Russian elite that is worshiping a different political religion and completely different values. If this does not happen, then the war of ideologies will automatically turn into a war of languages. More precisely, the war of languages happening in our country is not at its first year because the Ukrainian Russian language is not charged enough with Ukrainian and European values.

expression in Ukraine, it can offer a democratic counterbalance and show that it is the only country of the 'Russkii Mir' where people can say what they want in Russian[232]. In the collective psyche, Russian can acquire a different axiological dimension. Furthermore, Snyder also sees it as an offensive tool which could serve to create Ukrainian media in Russian which would reach Russia, Crimea, and the Donbass region[233]. If Russia is the only reference when it comes to Russian, then the underlying values associated to the language will remain the same. The long intricated common history has also attributed to Ukraine the possession of the Russian language and, in the postcolonial context, it could serve as a tool to challenge hegemonic discourses. As Kurkov puts it, it would be an opportunity to make the Ukrainian Russian language more European. This fits well Kurkov's position that Ukraine's fate lies in Europe.

During our meeting in Kyiv, the Russian-speaking journalist Maksim Butchenko told me that, in the world of journalism and edition, it is usually necessary to also master Ukrainian in order to climb the ladder but there is no stigma for writing in Russian. The same applies for the relations between people, speaking Russian in not perceived as non-Ukrainian. However, the issue of the Russian language is essentially political[234]. For this reason, Kurkov advocates that Russian-speaking voters should be considered, through the recognition of their language, Ukrainian citizens instead of being depicted as a fifth column or enemies of the country[235]. Kurkov fears the political consequences of the stigmatisation of Russian-speakers can have on domestic politics[236].

Both Kurkov and Snyder advocate for the creation of a linguistic institute formalising the Ukrainian Russian language. Drawing on postcolonial and postimperial developments, Snyder outlines the three steps that Ukraine should follow in order to proceed to the appropriation of Russian: standardise the language by writing dictionaries and textbooks, provide shelter for Russian-speaking writers of the post-Soviet space, and report on Russia[237]. By codifying it in a way similar to American and British English, Ukrainians will be able to tell the difference and to know exactly from where comes the content of what they are reading or watching[238]. Snyder prolongs by underlining the fact that Spain or France do not have any influence whatsoever on Quebec or South-American countries when it comes

[232] Hromadske, "Historian Snyder."
[233] *Ibid.*
[234] Interview with the author in Kyiv, March 2019.
[235] Kurilenko, "Andrei Kurkov."
[236] *Ibid.*
[237] Hromadske, "Historian Snyder."
[238] *Ibid.*

to the language[239]. Therefore, Russian has become an independent phenomenon and by appropriating it, Ukraine would become itself a centre of linguistic normativity and would break the relation of dependency that the current linguistic situation maintains. Ultimately, Kurkov claims that such measures could allow the creation of a transnational collaboration similar to the 'Francophonie'[240] across the post-Soviet space but in a less imperialistic fashion than the 'Russkii Mir'[241], every country having appropriated Russian.

The main argument opposed to this idea is the detrimental effect that such measure could have on the existence of the Ukrainian language. Snyder dismisses these potential threats by insisting on the fact that Russian cannot have the same level of legal protection and promotion and that Ukrainisation is the way to go[242]. In turn, Kurkov does not envision the recognition of Russian without sensitising Russian-speakers to the fact they must learn Ukrainian as a proof of their patriotism[243]. Such measure should not liberate them from the obligation to learn the state language and to embrace the political values of their country:

> "Если они граждане Украины, но политические россияне, им здесь делать нечего"[244].

In the end, the deterritorialisation of the Russian language happened during the Maidan revolution as a symbolical, abstract, immaterial phenomenon. This has led to changes of perspectives and contributed to strengthen a version of Ukrainianness based on self-identification and inclusivity. However, Gerasimov has expressed worries regarding the lack of any discursive strategy to counter Ukrainian nationalists[245]. He notes the incapacity of Russian-speakers not to remain mute when being called 'Muscovite' or any other derogatory words for Russians[246]. Despite the emergence of a new Ukrainian hybridity, they are confronted to the fact that they indeed speak a language that is way too similar to the one spoken in Russia. This is exactly where Kurkov's proposition (and Snyder's) can

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[239] *Ibid.*
[240] The sum of organisations, governements and populations for which French is a lingua franca. The Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie is an institutional materialisation of this state of fact and promotes cultural cooperation.
[241] Pavel Kazarin, "Andrei Kurkov: «Ya by ne Svalival v Kuchu Vsekh Russkoyazychnykh»," *Krym.Realii,* June 15, 2018. https://ru.krymr.com/a/29289688.html
[242] Hromadske, "Historian Snyder."
[243] Kurilenko, "Andrei Kurkov."
[244] *Ibid*; "If they are citizens of Ukraine, but politically oriented towards Russia, there is nothing to do here [Ukraine] for them".
[245] Gerasimov, "Ukraine Postcolonial Revolution," 14.
[246] *Ibid*, 14.

unleash its full potential. The specificity of Kurkov lies in the fact that he wishes the official deterritorialisation of Russian. Whereas the hybridity promoted by Russian-speaking citizens and writers remains a symbolical challenge against hegemonic discourses, he proposes active measures that are to be achieved concretely, bringing this issue in the realms of (geo)politics. If Ukrainian Russians speak a language that has been standardised in a Ukrainian way, therefore the association with Moscow will be more difficult to make. Such reform could contribute to put an end to postcolonial ambivalences between the centre and the periphery.

For this reason, after having analysed all traits of the Maidan hybridity in relation with Kurkov's non-fictional productions and public interventions, I argue that Kurkov is the 'tip of the sword' of the alleged postcolonial movement brought by the revolution. His proposition to deterritorialise Russian is the decisive element which differentiates him from other Russian-speaking writers. If we accept the hypothesis that Ukraine displays postcolonial features, the fact that Kurkov is aiming to decisively solve the relations of dependency between Russia and Ukraine, allows me to define him as a postcolonial writer. He is opening the way for Russian-speakers to be part of the Ukrainian national identity. Finally, the eventual recognition of Russian would give to Russian-speaking writers a reason to change the scope of their literary productions. Instead of reproducing narratives of displacement, legacies of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, they might begin to participate in the development of Ukrainian national identity through their books.

Conclusion

In summary, this thesis set out to analyse the posture of Andrei Kurkov, the most famous Russian-speaking Ukrainian writer, within the postcolonial process which began in 2014. Although Kurkov is, in his own words, the only Russian-speaking writer who is politically vocal in the public debate, there has been no significant study on this side of his activities. Given that the Maidan revolution has radically transformed the conception of Ukrainian national identity towards more inclusion of 'Ukrainian Russians', this thesis aimed at offering an analysis of this writer who embodies this new trend.

Ukraine's condition as a 'borderland' as well as the Russian domination has left it with a complicated ethnolinguistic composition. This entangled legacy has traditionally favoured analyses emphasizing the weakness of the country's diverse identity, especially the 'theory of the two Ukraines' broadly splitting the country between Ukrainian and Russian speakers. However, some scholars called for new

paradigms for the study of the country. The application of postcolonial frames has been progressively introduced in the field of post-Soviet studies in order to offer alternative approaches on mechanisms of cultural dependence in the former republics. It has been argued that defining Ukraine as a former Russian colony is inaccurate due to the ambivalence of the relationship between the two countries. However, scholars have drawn on postcolonial paradigms to analyse phenomena that are common to the post-Soviet space and the former colonial empires. In this context, Ukrainian Russian speakers were considered a hybrid community, imprisoned by its double roots and unable to come to terms with it.

The Maidan revolution has given scholars an opportunity to refresh the postcolonial lens when it comes to study Ukraine. Scholars writing for the journal *Ab Imperio* defined it as a 'postcolonial revolution' as it triggered the complete reformation of Ukraine's identity regarding the difficult question of the lingering cultural Russian presence. The postcolonial concept of hybridity, which served to analyse complicated hybrid cultural background, is now interpreted by these scholars as having a positive effect which can help Ukraine solve its post-Soviet relations of dependency with Russia and challenges discourses about fixed national identities. Indeed, Maidanites began to promote their hybrid identity. This concept is characterised by the fact that it is brought by a revolution with high social implications, practices of dis-identification from the hegemonic power, and the deterritorialisation of the Russian language.

The objective of this thesis was to analyse in what ways Kurkov belongs to such postcolonial movement by applying these features to his journal of the revolution and his political stances. Firstly, I have shown that Kurkov was fully aware of the ground-breaking nature of the events taking place in front of him. He supported this radical change and participated in it. Secondly, in the context of the revolution, Kurkov clearly dis-identifies himself from Russia despite the fact that he is a an ethnic Russian and a Russian speaker. He promotes a positive version of his hybrid identity fully compatible with his Ukrainian patriotism. The support for the concept of 'Ukrainian Russian' is in line with the general movement described by Gerasimov within the forces of the revolution. This alternative space of expression constitutes a challenge to hegemonic discourses such as the 'Russkiy Mir'. Finally, the deterritorialisation of Russian constitutes, in my opinion, the key element which decisively defines Kurkov as a postcolonial writer. The practices of dis-identification contribute to symbolically make Russian a Ukrainian language. According to himself, Kurkov is the only Russian-speaking writer who advocates for the official recognition of the language. Beyond the realm of symbols, he set out to

officially and concretely deterritorialise Russian and accomplish the positive valorisation of hybridity, which allows to challenge postcolonial relations of dependency.

The consecration of the hybrid identity of Ukrainian Russians opens new perspectives regarding Ukraine's identity and cultural relations with Russia. Recognising ethnic Russians and Russian speakers as Ukrainian citizens might help strengthening the country's fragmented identity. This postcolonial revolution appears to propose a reassessment of the conception of 'Russianness' as a phenomenon which is less connected to Russia and starts to have its own existence. The official deterritorialisation of Russian could favour Ukraine's resistance against neo-imperialistic endeavours of the Kremlin which seeks to retain power in its neighbourhood. In this light, the promotion of hybridity might contribute to disentangle post-Soviet (or postcolonial) relations between the two countries. This could also serve as a model for other countries of the post-Soviet space which host on their soil communities of the Russian diaspora.

The Maidan revolution has also launched a re-evaluation of Ukraine's cultural identity. The Ukrainian literary field has radically changed and opened itself to Russian-speaking writers. They have already begun to distance themselves from the former centre of the empire and seemingly found a legitimacy as Russian-speaking Ukrainian writers. While their literary productions usually expressed their difficulties to come to terms with their hybrid heritage, they might in the future write other narratives which could contribute to the formation of Ukraine's identity. The country is also re-evaluating its literary history. An example of this trend is the recognition of Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) as a Ukrainian writer. For long, he was more associated with the Russian empire than with the Ukrainian national narrative[247]. As the conception of Ukrainian identity has changed, he is now more and more considered as part of Ukraine's cultural heritage[248]. Overall, despite the emergence of strong anti-Russian sentiments since the revolution, the Russian part of Ukraine's culture seems more and more recognised.

If Kurkov's proposition is one day fully realised, an official Ukrainian form of the Russian language will be consecrated, and writers will be the ones creating it. Not only Kurkov, but Russian-speaking writers in general have the potential to push forward the postcolonial process to its term. At the very beginning of our interview, asked about the role of Russian-speaking writers in Ukraine, Kurkov

[247] Blacker, "Blurred Lines."
[248] *Ibid.*

declared that there was none. However, he might be the one who will consecrate their relevance in today's Ukraine.

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