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In Search of the Lands of Rus’: The Idea of Ukraine in the Imagination of the Little Russian Movement (1917–1919)

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Abstract

The article explores the idea of Ukraine in the imagination of the Little Russian politicians during the revolutionary period of 1917–1919. It chiefly focuses on figures of the Little Russian movement, such as Vasilii Shulgin (1878–1976), Anatolii Savenko (1874–1922), Andrey Storozhenko (1857–1926), Aleksandr Bilimovich (1876–1963), and others. This article explores the ideas of the Little Russians regarding the term *Ukraine* and their views concerning the Ukrainian people and its ethnographic and historical boundaries. It argues that Ukraine and Ukrainians were perceived as a Little Russia, Southern Russia, Southern Rus’, and Little Russians accordingly. By their assessment, Ukraine had not included the Taurida (the New Russia region) and the Crimea, but had included Eastern Galicia and Volhynia.

Keywords: Ukraine; Little Russia; nationalism; nation building; revolution

In the summer of 1917, the outstanding historian and professor of the Imperial Novorossiia University (Odessa) Ivan Lynnychenko, addressing his colleague Mykhailo Hrushevsky, wrote, “Who and why needs this autonomy [for Ukraine] this secession, this separation and dissociation from all-Russian affairs? Not the Little-Russian people, who do not at all think of such a secession. The idea of such a separation [from Russia], of its necessity, has yet to be instilled in people’s minds [...]. The Little-Russian autonomists themselves are not yet clear on the territorial boundaries of their lands” (Linnichenko 1917, 28).

Lynnychenko, who had studied under the Kiev professor Volodymyr Antonovych together with Hrushevsky, was mistaken in the latter part of his statement. Already during the First World War (1914–1918) many Ukrainian politicians and intellectuals knew very well what the outline of Ukraine’s future territory should look like, and they were theorizing about the boundaries of Ukraine’s future autonomy and statehood. Especially after 1916, they no longer believed in the success of a possible decentralization under the Romanovs, yet they continued to discuss plans for a reconstitution of the country into a federation and for a future democratic republic (Kenez 1977, 140–177; Procyk 1995). The notion and image of Ukraine, its territory and history, became an important element in the doctrines and programs of virtually every political party in the Little Russian provinces (according to the official labels). Declaring this position, the leaders of the Ukrainian national movement identified their own sphere of influence and ethnic space, where, incidentally, the nationalizing people had not yet fully formed its own identity.

This article explores the ideas of a different cluster of political commentators and theorists in Ukraine—the Little Russian politicians—regarding the term *Ukraine* and their views concerning the Ukrainian people and its ethnographic and historical boundaries. The Little Russians is a collective name for a political group whose representatives recognized the distinctiveness of Ukraine / Little Russia and of Ukrainian / the Little Russian language, but at the same time they

considered the land and its people to be a part of the All-Russian project. They professed the idea of “one and indivisible Russia,” although, to be sure, they interpreted it differently from its official version as promulgated by the Russian White movement and nationalists. This political group—the Little Russian politicians—can be defined as Russian nationalists because they identified themselves as Russians and recognized that the Little Russian people existed as a part of the pan-Russian nation. It should also be stressed that after the February revolution of 1917, the Little Russian leaders mainly abandoned the monarchist rhetoric and no longer considered the restoration of autocracy (*samoderzhavie*) as the ultimate political goal. The latter aspect is essential because it is an illustration of how vague and superficial, sometimes contradictory and inconsistent, the statements and political slogans by leaders of the Little Russian movement were.

This article chiefly focuses on prominent figures of the Little Russian movement: Vasilii Shulgin (1878–1976), Anatolii Savenko (1874–1922), Andrey Storozhenko (1857–1926), Aleksandr Bili-movich (1876–1963), and others. First, it examines their perception and interpretation of the terms *Ukraine* and *the Ukrainian people*, and it provides a critique based on historical arguments. Second, it describes how the Little Russians imagined the “Little Russian lands,” “Novorossia,” and the “territory of Southern Russia.” Third, it aims at reconstructing the evolution of ideas, opinions, and arguments regarding the political and cultural image of Ukraine / Little Russia. In general, the Little Russian leaders did not exert much influence on the political processes in Ukraine after 1918. Only after joining the Volunteer Army in 1919 were they able to determine sufficiently their leadership’s position on Russia’s nationality policy and the Ukrainian issue.

Proceeding from this, the research hypothesis of the article is as follows: the formation of modern nations in East-Central Europe, including Ukraine, was based on the spread of ideas about history, political self-determination, and national territory among the elites and the general public of the emerging nations. The shaping of ideas about ethnic territory, the transfer of such ideas, and the emergence of the concept of a nation played a significant role in the construction of imagined national space. The American historian Steven Seegel has shown how the use of maps and atlases puncturing ethnic and national borders predetermined the essence of the ideology of empires and national movements (Seegel 2012). In his opinion, “the lands between Vienna and St. Petersburg, including the divided Poland and the annexed zones of Cossack Ukraine, were thoroughly imperialized after 1772, ethnoschematized after the revolts of 1848–1849 and 1863–1864, and geopoliticized in the decades before 1914” (Seegel 2012, 3).

Polish historian Maciej Górny (2014) has put forward another account—in my view, a more convincing one. He centered his theory on the transfer of ideas of racial, geographical, and biological dimensions, which circulated among the national movements of East-Central Europe and the Balkans, and he demonstrated their significant influence on the formulation of national ideologies. This was especially important in the context of constructing the necessary image of the Other, which each national movement developed by stressing differences in mentality. It also played an important role in formulating territorial and (anti)colonial claims against the neighboring nations and ethnic groups. During the revolutionary period of 1918–1921, various political forces used the geographical argument as an ideological tool to prove a separate identity of the emerging new nations or to maintain the status quo for the old, post-imperial ones (Górny 2017, 114–118).

Benedict Anderson’s (1991, 6–7) concept of a nation as an imagined political community is methodologically essential for this article. After all, the crux of the discussions and intellectual efforts of that time was, Which nation building project will prevail? (The pan-Russian one or a separate Ukrainian one?) Here, the question of self-perception arises, and the Little Russians’ own identification becomes an important factor to consider. On the one hand, they emphasized their Russianness. On the other hand, they had a very fragmented image of the “triune Russian nation” (*triedinyy russkiy narod*), subdividing it into more than three groups. For example, they differentiated the Ruthenians (Carpatho-Ukrainians or Carpatho-Ruthenians) and the Red Russians (*chervonorossy*) from the Little Russians (*malorossy*), and they included them in the pan-Russian national project. It follows that multiple other factors, including language, race, culture, and

mentality, went into the notion of a common national territory. The leaders of the Little Russian movement often used a cluster of such arguments in their political struggle.

During the First World War, the political climate in the ethnically Ukrainian provinces of the Russian and Habsburg empires changed in many ways, and the Ukrainian national movement underwent several important ideological transformations. The first change was the adoption of the idea of gathering the Ukrainian ethnic lands, which now occupied a prominent position in the ideology of the national movement (Szporluk 2009). To be sure, it had existed even earlier, and—in the wake of the Spring of Nations 1848–1849—it even received a name: *sobornist'* (unity). A second change was that, after 1917, the idea of Ukraine's independence from Russia replaced the concept of national autonomy and began to be perceived as the ultimate goal of all political efforts, and it was included in the programs of many Ukrainian parties and organizations (Liubovets' 2003, 27–28).

On the contrary, the activists of the Little Russian movement, while acknowledging the distinctness of the Little Russian (Ukrainian) people, insisted on the eternal borders of the Russian lands, and, in doing so, they relied on historical arguments. At the same time, they clearly formulated their position on Ukrainian statehood. Since the 1860s Russian nationalists had been considered the Ukrainian national movement as a political enemy. In general, the Little Russians professed the concept of a pan-Russian people (Andriewsky 2003; Kappeler 2003; Hillis 2013). Any official and political recognition of the idea of the Ukrainian nation had deconstructed their All-Russian nation-building project (Kappeler 2003; Miller 2003). Their corrective may be summarized as follows: the Little Russians were indeed a distinct people, but only in the sense that they formed an independent branch within a larger Russian nation, whereas the Ukrainians as a completely separate ethnos was a fiction and anti-Russian project. For the Little Russians, the Ukrainian question was a political issue rather than a national one, in that it lacked clear ethnic, linguistic, and cultural dimensions. Until 1917 the term Ukraine in cultural and regional meanings was frequently—and even positively—used among the Little Russian leaders (Fedevich 2016). The revolution and the creation of a Ukrainian autonomy, and, later, the proclamation of sovereignty in January 1918, largely changed their rhetoric. They began to view Ukraine and the Ukrainians as political enemies, as an opposing political party, and as a disruptive movement.

However, the paradox and irony of the situation at that time was that, to a large extent, it was the ideas of the Little Russian movement that determined the evolution of the Ukrainian national program, influencing quite strongly the formation of modern Ukrainian identity among peasants (Fedevych and Fedevych 2017). During the First World War, several Kiev-based organizations of Russian nationalists—the Kiev Club of Progressive Russian Nationalists, the Union of the Russian People, and the Little Russian Gogol Union—continued to refer to the Ukrainian provinces in accordance with the official imperial nomenclature, namely, as the Southwestern Krai. Southwestern Krai denoted the three imperial provinces on the Right-Bank Ukraine: Kyiv, Podillia, and Volhynia. It was a strange vision of the Little Russians about the borders of the Ukrainian lands. This tangle of definitions was obvious for the Little Russian discourse that consisted of vague and misrepresented understandings of the idea of Ukraine. After the fall of tsarism in 1917, they limited the borders of imagined Ukraine to the territory of the Kyiv, Poltava, and Chernihiv provinces. Thus, they instrumentalized the concept of Ukraine, using it to achieve concrete political goals.

However, in the spring of 1917, Vasilii Shulgin, a former member of the Russian State Duma and the editor of the influential newspaper *Kievlyanin* (*Kievan*), in response to the formation of the Ukrainian Central Council (*Rada*), proposed changing the imperial provincial system and forming the Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov, and Yekaterinoslav regions (1919a). However, Shulgin did not present concrete borders for four regions. In doing so, he actually outlined precisely the borders of Little Russia (Ukraine), which the Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv claimed. Ironically, the very concept of and term *Ukraine* evoked a sharply negative reaction in Shulgin and other Little Russian leaders. At a meeting commemorating the anniversary of the Pereyaslav Council of 1654, which was held in Kyiv in January 1918, Shulgin expressed the most characteristic attitude toward the term *Ukraine*, emphasizing expressively its falsehood. This stance served as the starting point for the debate,

namely, what the term *Ukraine* meant. In 1916 Shulgin had made a controversial statement that “Volhynia had never been called Ukraine” (Sheluhin 1916, 62). After a difficult compromise between the Provisional Government in Petrograd and the Ukrainian Central Rada in Kyiv, which resulted in the adoption of the July 1917 edict (the Second Universal), the editor of *Kievlyanin* had launched a political campaign against the “forcible Ukrainization of Southern Russia” (*Kievlyanin* 1917a). Such an evolution of Shulgin’s political views testifies to a rather vague and fragmented understanding of the concept of Little Russia, to which he referred in his works as Ukraine, Little Russia, and Southern Russia (not to mention the official administrative labels of the imperial period). Nevertheless, in the fall of 1917, the editorial staff of *Kievlyanin* put up with the proclamation of the Ukrainian People’s Republic. Moreover, Shulgin took part in the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly as a representative of the Russian minority in Ukraine. The Assembly never met due the war with the Bolsheviks. For Shulgin, the election certainly was an argument against the legitimacy of the Ukrainian national power in Kyiv. However, by the beginning of 1918, the domestic political and geopolitical situation had changed dramatically: the advance of the Bolshevik troops on Kyiv continued, and the Ukrainian People’s Republic began peace negotiations with the Central Powers.

In January 1918, Shulgin founded the journal *Malaya Rus’* (*Little Russia*), whose first issue appeared at the end of February. This publication revealed a significant evolution of the political rhetoric of the Little Russian movement. The historical context of that time—the declaration of independence of the Ukrainian People’s Republic (January 1918) and the separate peace negotiations, which the Bolsheviks and Ukrainians held with the Germans in Brest-Litovsk (intermittently from December 1917 to March 1918)—forced the leaders of the movement to seek new ideological formulations and slogans.

In his introduction to *Malaya Rus’*, Shulgin stressed that “of all the lies which the hurricane of 1917 has heaped upon the Russian plain, the most astonishing mound of deception has been erected in the fields of our native land [*rodnoi krai*], that is, on the bosom of Little Russia, as we call it, or Ukraine, as it is called by others” (1918, 3). Shulgin calls the Ukrainian lands within the empire a territory (*krai*). This definition is key for understanding the subsequent evolution of the ideological and geographical discourses. Two points are quite telling of Shulgin’s position at the time. First, the designation of Ukraine as a *krai* was suitable for demonstrating the artificiality and the misleading nature of the very term *Ukraine* as well as for stressing its borderland or frontier nature. Second, Shulgin arrived at a conclusion which fully reflected a significant change in the self-identity of the post-imperial society: “Most revolutions were made by ‘magic words’ which the masses did not understand. In 1917, one of these magic words was the name ‘Ukraine’ ” (1918, 4). It was precisely against the term *Ukraine* that the Little Russian leaders fought a principled war until 1921 because the word’s meaning, they felt, was being distorted by the Ukrainian national movement.

In 1917, the Little Russians were recognizing the “ancient Kyiv” as the capital of the territory (*krai*) (Shulgin 1918, 6). Examining the ideology of the Russian nationalists in Kyiv, one can detect a certain transformation: they began to single out a distinct Little Russian realm from within greater Russia and even to lay claims to lands where Ukrainians made up only a relative majority. Spatial accents were now set differently. Prior to 1917, Little Russia had been perceived as a historical region with distinct boundaries, a constituent part of the Southwestern Krai. After 1917, the imagined Little Russian realm overlapped with, or was extended to and superimposed on, other historical and ethnic regions around Little Russia, such as Sloboda Ukraine, Eastern Galicia, Bukovina, Volhynia, and Novorossia (including the northern districts of the Taurida Governorate outside of the Crimea peninsula). Crimea itself, however, was never perceived by the Little Russians as an integral part of Ukraine.

This new tendency is fully captured in an article by Andrey Storozhenko. Educated as a historian, he served as a marshal of the nobility in the Pereyaslav district (*uyezd*) (1912–1916) and a chief of the Kiev Union of Parish Councils in 1917. Storozhenko held a reactionary opinion on the Ukrainian issue. In his article, he reminds the reader that Little Russia used to be the center of

ancient Russian statehood. However, after the Treaty of Eternal Peace (1686) between the tsardom of Moscow and the Polish-Lithuanian state, this name was applied only to the Left-Bank Ukraine and Kyiv, which had become parts of the Muscovite state (Storozhenko 1918, 12). He stressed that the name Little Russia (or Russia Minor) was in no way indicative of the region's small size or historical insignificance. On the contrary, the term points to the region's historical primacy in ancient statehood and its original central political position within Old (Kyivan) Rus'. The term *Ukraine*, on the other hand, is defined as a territory on "the edge of a kingdom," a frontier area or borderland (Storozhenko 1918, 13). The word *ukrainnyi* means "a borderland one," and an inhabitant of a frontier is a *ukrainyanin* or *ukrainnik* (Storozhenko 1918, 14). Storozhenko highlighted the role of Poland in the spreading of the term *Ukraine* as a proper noun. He lay the blame on the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, who was keen on Polish messianism and considered Ukraine to be an integral part of the Polish-Lithuanian state (Storozhenko 1918, 17). At that time, the term *Ukraine* was included in Polish-language terminological apparatus and was applied to the Southern Russian lands. Here Storozhenko's point is incorrect. It is known that the term *Ukraine* was used already in the Middle Ages (Plokhy 2006).

A similar interpretation was offered by Anatoliy Savenko, an influential Kievan journalist and the former deputy of the Russian State Duma. He maintained that Little Russia referred to the historical center of the land of Rus', not its edge or frontier (*krai*), and claimed that the designations Ukraine and Ukrainians had been entrenched in the population's self-consciousness and everyday speech thanks to the works of Mykhailo Hrushevsky (Savenko 1918, 20–21, 26). The Ukrainian historian, in his opinion, had created a separate Ukrainian language from scratch as a mixture of Russian, Polish, German, Latin, and French. "In their linguistic separatism," Savenko stressed, "the Ukrainians have been so decisive and unceremonious that even the works of Taras Shevchenko, whom they supposedly honor, they have blasphemously 'reupholstered' [*perelitsevali*]: [...] the Ukrainian activists have rewritten all of Shevchenko's works [using the Austrian spelling] in order to fit the phonetics of the Austrian [dialect]" (1918, 21). In Savenko's own interpretation, Little Russian means Ukrainian because "the Russian population of Southern and Little Russia is called Little Russians" (1918, 30). For Shulgin and Storozhenko, nested identity as both Russian and Little Russian is uncharacteristic. Both concluded that the term *Ukraine* had usually referred to the Middle Dnipro region (*Serednye Podniprovie*) since the Cossack times and had meant only a portion of Little Russia. The concept itself had never had the "character of a national name" (Scheglov 1918, 38, 41), that is, an ethnonym.

In April, at a meeting of the Kiev Club of Progressive Russian Nationalists, a new political platform was worked out, which was then approved on May 4, 1917. It stated that "the Little Russians, like the Great Russians and the Belarusians, are a branch of the pan-Russian nation" (*Kievlyanin* 1917b). A separate statement highlighted the existence of Ukrainians as a special subgroup among the Little Russians, who could receive wide freedom of cultural and national self-determination. These formulations demonstrated an evolution in the ideological attitudes of the Little Russians. They recognized the Ukrainians as a separate people, identifying themselves differently than those who belong to the Russian tribe. It served the expansionist aspect of their doctrine whereby the territories in which the Little Russians, the Ukrainians, and the Western Ruthenians had lived since time immemorial were now recognized as belonging to Little Russia both ethnically and historically. In that sense, Eastern Galicia (*Chervonna Rus'*), Volhynia, and Subcarpathian Rus' were now perceived as integral parts of the Little Russian project and could be called Little Russia.

Similar sentiments and opinions dominated among the Russian-speaking intelligentsia of Kyiv. In the spring of 1917, several professors of the Kiev St. Vladimir University adopted a statement addressed to the Provisional Government in Petrograd. In it, they opposed the Ukrainization policy and questioned the authority of the Ukrainian Central Rada. However, this appeal is also interesting in another respect—it accused the Ukrainians of territorial expansion against the Russian sea: "Just how far their territorial claims extend? They are speaking of a Ukraine from the Carpathian

Mountains to the Black Sea and the Caucasus, that is, they include in the territory of a future Ukrainian state not only the lands to which Ukraine might have some historical claim but also those territories which have been acquired through joint efforts and with blood spilled by the totality of the Russian nation, under the leadership of Russian state power” (Dimanshtein 1930, 177). They accused the Ukrainian Central Rada of appropriating and incorporating proper Russian lands. This statement is a graphic illustration of Benedict Anderson’s thesis: the shaping of Ukraine and the making of the Ukrainian nation proceeded at the expense of the “united Russian nation” (Szporluk 1997).¹ This thesis was at the core of the stance that the Little Russian movement held toward Ukraine and its image.

One of the first people to construct the imagined borders of Little Russia and Southern Russia was a specialist in agriculture and a professor of economics at Kiev University (till the end of 1918), Aleksandr Bilimovich, Shulgin’s brother-in-law. He also was a member of the Kiev Club of Progressive Russian Nationalists. In multiple articles, he drew a definitive outline of the territories which he felt should be included in Little Russia. Previously, in the first number of the journal *Malaya Rus’*, he described the concept of the administrative structure of the Ukrainian lands (Bilimovich 1918). Bilimovich viewed Southern Russia through the lens of ethnic attributes, as a realm where the “Little Russian nationality” always prevails (1918, 46). For him, the historical population of the region was the Little Russians (*malorossy*), not the South Russians, the Ukrainians, or New Russians (*novorossy*). He pointed out that the Little Russians inhabit, and predominate in, Eastern Galicia and Bukovina, former provinces of Austro-Hungary. In his estimate of the geographical extent of the Little Russian lands, Bilimovich referred to the data of the Imperial Census of 1897 on the “settlement of the population according to their native language” (1918, 47). Pointing out the relative predominance of Little Russians (less than 50 percent), he also included the Kuban region (47.4 percent) and the Taurida Governorate (42.2 percent) in his project. In his description of it, Bilimovich called it Little Russian Southern Russia (*malorusskaya yuzhnaya Rus’*), where Ukrainians / Little Russians made up an absolute or relative majority. To the group of provinces with their numeric superiority, he included Kyiv, Podillia, Volhynia, Poltava, and Kharkiv. He also pointed out several districts (*uyezds*) where Little Russians constituted an absolute minority (the Mglin, Starodub, Novozybkov, and Surazh districts of the Chernihiv province; the Mariupol district of the Ekaterinoslav province; and the Odessa and Tiraspol [with the relative predominance of Ukrainians / Little Russians] districts of the Kherson province) (Bilimovich 1918, 50–51). It is even more interesting to consider his claim on those areas to be incorporated into the Little Russian territory, which had been earlier included mistakenly into other provinces. These include the following provinces: (1) the Taurida province (the Berdyansk, Melitopol, and [Dnipro] Dnieper districts); (2) the Kuban oblast (the Yeisk, Yekaterinodar, and Temryukvsky districts); (3) the Stavropol province (Novogrigoryevsk); (4) the Oblast of the Don Cossack Host (Taganrog); (5) the Voronezh province (Biryuchensk, Valuysk, Ostrog, and Boguchar); (6) the Kursk province (the Grayvoron, Novooskolsky, and Putivl’ districts); (7) Bessarabia (Khotyn and Akkerman districts); (8) the Lublin province (the Hrubieszów and Tomaszów districts [with their relative predominance of Ukrainians / Little Russians]); (9) the Siedlce province (the Włodawa and Bielsk districts [with their relative predominance of Ukrainians / Little Russians]); (10) the Grodno province (Brest [Brześć], Kobryn, Bielsk Podlaski) (Bilimovich 1918, 51).

In Bilimovich’s project, the territory of Southern Rus’ coincided with the Little Russian ethnographic and ethnic borders. In general, the Little Russians tended to use the approaches of those whom they sharply criticized and even considered enemies, that is, the Ukrainian national movement. During the All-Ukrainian National Congress (April 1917) a member of the Ukrainian Central Rada, Fedir Matushevsky (1869–1919), drew a similar image of the Ukrainian ethnic lands (Verstiuk 2003, 151–152). This outline of the Ukrainian ethnic lands was used by Ukrainian elites as a project of the future national territory. However, Matushevsky names eight imperial provinces as such that have a Ukrainian majority while Bilimovich names only five. But more important here is the logic of making the national territories. It was a construction of national space characterized by

“ethnographic determinism”. Included within these provisional ethnographic borders of the imagined Ukrainian ethnic community were territories even with a relative prevalence of 40–50 percent of inhabitants. Yet at the same time, Bilimovich still used the vocabulary and ideological rhetoric which was characteristic of the Little Russians in Kyiv during the war: Ukraine is primarily Southern Russia, and the Ukrainians are Little Russians. For obvious ideological reasons, he avoided the terms *Ukraine* and *Ukrainians*. In his interpretation Little Russia was merely a regional and administrative part of Southern Russia and not an ethnographic region ethnically distinct from the other parts of the Russian lands. In general, Bilimovich’s project outlines the borders of the Little Russian autonomy as a bridgehead against Bolshevik Russia.

After the fall of Hetmanate Ukraine in December 1918, most Little Russian organizations went underground. However, the creation of the Volunteer Army and the prospects of military aid from the Entente allies changed the situation. Prominent Little Russian leaders joined the White movement. At the end of December 1918, Shulgin became one of the political advisers to the government of Odessa, headed by Aleksei Grishin-Almazov. He suggested creating a Preparatory Commission on the Nationality Issue, which was supported by the General Command of the Armed Forces of South Russia (Procyk 1995, 121). The core purpose of this body was to elaborate the future political and administrative structure of Russia and to formulate ways of resolving the national issue. Within the Commission, a Little Russian section was established, consisting of the Novorossia University professors Ivan Lynnychenko and Aleksandr Lyapunov, the Kiev University professor Aleksandr Bilimovich, and the former Russian State Duma deputy Anatoliy Savenko. The work of the section was supervised by Shulgin (Procyk 1995, 121).

In February 1919, Shulgin published one of his programmatic essays, where he presented his insights into the future political system of Russia. Shulgin turned to the principle of regional autonomy, which, in his opinion, could form the basis for the rebuilding of Russia. He attacked the Ukrainian national movement for envisioning an autonomist policy, accusing their appeal for federalization and national autonomy as having for its underlying core goal a disintegration of Russia (Shulgin 1919a). Reacting to that so-called secessionist scheme, Shulgin proposed to introduce a more decentralized, regional government structure, whereby the competence of the local authorities would be expanded, while generally maintaining a unitary state model. Shulgin rejected the federalist theory and objected against introducing its elements into the future political system of new Russia. The American historian Anna Procyk has stressed in her commentary that “the rejection of a federation meant in practice the denial of all political claims made by the nationalities” (Procyk 1995, 121). In general, such political views of Shulgin ran counter the contemporary nation-building processes that were sweeping the lands of the former Romanov empire.

In April 1919, the French troops left Odesa, and the Preparatory Commission moved to Ekaterinodar. In the summer of 1919, one of the members of the Little Russian section, the above-mentioned Bilimovich, presented in a special paper the views of the Little Russian movement on the future regional and administrative division of Russia. Analyzing several proposals, he concluded that none of them had a rational and practical basis. His core argument was as follows: the province must be abolished because it impeded economic cooperation between regions and strengthened ethnicity-based secessionist tendencies. Therefore, Bilimovich estimated favorably the project developed by Mykhailo Drahomanov titled “A Free Union” (*Vilna Spilka – Volny Soyuz*), which proposed the abandonment of the province-based administrative division. Drahomanov’s project suggested the new territorial and political system of the Russian empire, which consists of self-government bodies: from local to statewide, the communal (village and town), volost (group of villages), uyezd (district), regions, and the state as a whole (1952, 195).

At the same time, Bilimovich criticized the idea of dividing Southern Russia into four regions. In his estimation, this division was suboptimal due to different levels of economic development in the proposed constituent parts (Bilimovich 1919, 9–10). Bilimovich’s biggest objections were directed at Mykhailo Hrushevsky’s proposal of for new administrative division, which he had published in

the newspaper *Narodna Volya* (*People's Will*) in December 1918. The former head of the Ukrainian Central Rada had proposed replacing the existing provinces and districts with 27 lands and three metropolitan areas (Bilimovich 1919, 24). His project was predicated on the idea of federalization. Bilimovich pointed out that Hrushevsky's idea corresponded to the "old historical areas" and could be viewed as "a kind of geographical restoration." He emphasized that this kind of administrative division implied a centralistic model of government, as opposed to the decentralist project of Drahomanov (1919, 29). Bilimovich was primarily concerned with the economic and geographic factors, thereby neglecting the national and ethnic aspects. He pictured Southern Russia as consisting of the following parts: (1) the Southwestern Krai (Right-Bank Little Russia) with the regional center in Kyiv; it included the Kyiv and Zhytomyr provinces, as well as Volhynia and Podillia (centered on Vinnytsia); (2) Left-Bank Little Russia, with the regional center in Kharkiv; it included the Kharkiv, Chernihiv, and Poltava provinces; (3) and New Russia (*Novorossiya*; the Southern Oblast [*Stepnaya oblast'*]), with the regional capital in Odesa; it included the Odesa, Kherson, Yekaterinoslav, and Melitopol provinces, the Taurida Governorate (with the government seat in Simferopol), and Bessarabia (with the center in Kishinev [Chisinau]) (Bilimovich 1919, 34–35). At the same time, Bilimovich considered to be the most realistic and practical a tripartite division of Ukraine into three provinces: Kyiv (Little Russian), Odesa (New Russian / "Novorossiyan"), and Kharkiv.

As Bilimovich's views evolved, they increasingly represented the attitudes of Little Russian leaders toward Ukraine. For them, Ukraine was a political fiction. In reality, it was Southern Russia, historical Rus'. In general, his project erased ethnographic and historical borders and fully matched the approaches of imperial and colonial domination.

Bilimovich had thus abandoned his earlier attitude toward the concept of Little Russia; for him, it no longer was a historical region or an ethnographic land but rather a purely administrative region. Thus, the Little Russian leaders had ideologically instrumentalized the concept of Ukraine, ceasing to use it as an independent definition. Since the beginning of 1919, Little Russia, in their perception, was no longer associated or compared with Ukraine but was considered an organic part of Russia. Bilimovich's project is unusual in that it divided the Ukrainian lands into three parts: Little Russia, New Russia, and the Crimea (Taurida). These three regions belonged to the pan-Russian space that had never had any historical features, nor could it claim any economic independence.

In August 1919, after the capture of Kyiv by the Volunteer Army, the Little Russians changed their political rhetoric. The concept of Southern Russia, instead of Little Russia, prevailed; the use of the label Southwestern Krai was finally abandoned. On August 21 in Taganrog, General Denikin issued an appeal to the "population of Little Russia" (meaning Ukraine as a whole). The document had been prepared by Shulgin and Pavel Novgorodtsev. In this document the notion Southern Russia is also used and understood as all the provinces where Little Russians comprised a majority. The proposed "Fundamental Principles of the Organization of Governance of Southern Russia" indicated that the unification of the Little Russian provinces into a single autonomous region would not fit the principle of regional decentralization, as Denikin highlighted: "It is impossible to combine Volhynia and the Kharkiv region or the Chernihiv region and the Kherson region because these parts of Southern Russia have nothing in common" (Kievlyanin 1919a).

It was also suggested that, in the future, Southern Russia should be divided into several regions according to the principle of regional (*oblast'*) autonomy. The Little Russian leaders borrowed the latter concept from the political lexicon of the Cadet party, which had used it as an ideological slogan and an element of the Cadet party's program during and after the revolution of 1905–1907. Such liberalization of the Little Russians' views was not accidental: it directly followed from the rejection of monarchy and autocracy in the future political system.

Based on the idea of regional autonomy, the Little Russian leaders proposed dividing Ukraine into independent administrative entities, which were no longer recognized as purely Ukrainian

in the ethnic, political, and social senses. Denikin's occupation of Ukraine witnessed an increased activity of the Little Russian movement. On August 7, 1919, "the Little Russian section" adopted a draft administrative reform in the territory of Southern Russia (Boiko 2010, 125). According to it, three separate autonomous regions were distinguished with their own self-government bodies: Kyiv or Little Russia (the Kyiv and Chernihiv provinces), Odesa or Novorossiysk (the Taurida and Kherson provinces), and the Kharkiv or *Gornopromyshlenaya* (Mining) Oblast (the Kharkiv, Yekaterinoslav, and Poltava provinces, as well as the Berdyansk district of the Taurida province and the Kryvyi Rih region of the Kherson province) (*Kievlyanin* 1919a). The project was based on the economic and geographical foundations previously elaborated by Bilimovich. The Russian historian Dmitriy Babkov points out that this "plan of regional autonomy" had been developed by Shulgin under the aegis of the Kyiv National Center and the South Russian National Center in Odesa (Babkov 2012, 98). However, it was more of a suggestion for a temporary administrative structure for the southern regions of Russia, without the division of sovereignty and introduction of autonomy. According to the project, a governor-general with extensive powers should be appointed at the head of each region. It also included a clause on a regional council with representative functions. As a consequence, most Little Russian leaders gradually began to stop using the designation Little Russia in both the official and journalistic discourses.

In the fall of 1919, the political rhetoric of Little Russian leaders essentially changed. The main internal enemy of Russia was declared Ukraine and the Ukrainians. Certainly, such an evolution of the political lexicon was linked to the Volunteer Army's occupation of the Ukrainian lands, especially its control over Kyiv, established at the end of August 1919. In early September, Shulgin made some interesting statements: Little Russia was just one of the regions of "Great Russia," and the use of the name Ukrainian(s) would lead to "what the enemies of Bohdan Khmelnytsky had sought to achieve," namely, to erase the land's "Russian name" (Shulgin 1919c). His colleague Anatoliy Savenko contributed to this discourse. He wrote that within Russian history, Little Russia occupied the central position and was "the original and most ancient Russian area and the cradle of Russian statehood," while denying the existence of a "separate Ukrainian nation" and maintaining that "the Little Russians were the southern branch of the pan-Russian people" (Savenko 1919a, 1; Savenko 1919b). Among the Little Russian leaders, Savenko held the most radical and at the same time internally inconsistent views. On the one hand, he stressed the ethnographic distinctness and cultural separateness of Little Russia, but, on the other hand, according to him, no Little Russian language had ever existed.

Whereas Shulgin and other Little Russian politicians equated Ukraine and Little Russia, Savenko sharply contraposed them to one another. He defined Ukraine as a false creation that had received its name from outside of Russia. For Savenko, its semantics had solidified in the period the Polish-Lithuanian occupation, when former Kyivan Rus' turned into a frontier of the Polish-Lithuanian state and became its "*ukrayna*" (Savenko 1919a, 2). Savenko thereby identified the idea of Ukraine with the idea Kyivan Rus', an absurd identification even by the standards of historical knowledge achieved by that time. Furthermore, he stressed that the term *borderland* (*ukrayna*) was unsuitable as the land's name because its semantics were incompatible with the fact that Little Russia was the center of the Russian lands, and it never a periphery. Thus, Savenko exposed the Polish roots of the word *Ukraine* (Savenko 1919a, 3). Considering Kyiv as the capital of Little Russia, he emphasized the fact that, according to the last census, there lived more ethnic Russians (55 percent) than ethnic Ukrainians (12 percent).² He was convinced that the so-called Ukrainians was a political party rather than a real nation living in a certain national territory and having its own history (Savenko 1919a, 6). Serhii Hrushevsky, a godson of the famous Ukrainian historian and, in the 1920s, a prominent Ukrainian nationalist, likewise emphasized the artificiality of the concept of Ukraine, and he admitted the special role of the Austrians and the Germans in its emergence. He concluded that Ukraine was identical to Little Russia, a land which had always belonged to the "Great Russian tribe" (Grushevskiy 1919, 23).

In September 1919, the Denikin authorities published an article in *Kievlyanin* outlining their attitude toward Ukraine. It stated that “the regions of Southern Russia, having their own historical, geographical, domestic, and economic characteristics, should receive regional self-government” (*Kievlyanin* 1919b). At the end of October 1919, Shulgin announced that Eastern Galicia (*Halychyna*) was reorienting toward Russia, claiming, “Our rights to the Ruthenian Kingdom [*Korolevsto Russkoye*]” are “more ancient and more justified” than Poland’s (Shulgin 1919b). The issue of this statement is explained by the then going negotiations between the Volunteer Army and the Ukrainian Galician Army about a military alliance against the revival of Poland. The treaty was signed on November 6, 1919. Ultimately, Shulgin viewed Eastern Galicia as a primordial Russian land and an integral part of Great Russia, but not as Ukraine / Little Russia.

Conclusion

The Little Russians used the concept of Ukraine and recognized Ukraine as a political reality only for a short period. It happened in 1917–1918, during the periods of the Ukrainian Central Rada and Hetmanate. After that, the Little Russians revised their ideological slogans and political rhetoric. They contemplated the implementation of a new administrative system based on the principle of regional autonomy. This was the maximum they were willing to grant to the Ukrainian opponents. The Little Russians never accepted the historical, geographical, and ethnic arguments marshalled to substantiate the existence of Ukraine as a country and a separate Ukrainian nation. All their arguments were aimed at proving the opposite: Ukraine as a national territory and a separate ethnic organism had never existed; the nature of the Ukrainian issue was purely political. Shulgin stressed that between the Russians and the Ukrainians / Little Russians there were no racial or biological differences (Babkov 2012, 171).

In 1919 and later, the Little Russian movement perceived the Ukrainians as a political party, an invention of the Poles, or an Austrian intrigue. They treated the Ukrainians as a political group united by an anti-Russian idea, whose purpose was the destruction of Russia’s unity. Then, a change happened in their attitude toward the concepts of Little Russia and Little Rus’, which was no longer defined as a distinctive country in a cultural, economic, and social sense, as it was during the war and throughout the year of 1917. A different fate befell the notion of Little Russian (*maloross*). It automatically replaced the word Ukrainian and covered everyone who lived in the territory of Southern Russia. Thus, the Little Russians were viewed as already living in New Russia, the Crimea, and even Bessarabia, if only these lands would again be included in the Russian state. However, in the beginning of 1920, the historical reality went in the opposite direction.

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Notes

- 1 Using the example of modern Ukrainian history, the American historian Roman Szporluk has concluded that the emergence of the Ukrainian modern nation became possible as a result of a re-invention and rebuilding of large nations, in particular the Russian and Polish premodern nations.
- 2 In this case, Anatoliy Savenko was wrong about the percentage of Ukrainian speakers in Kyiv in 1897: they made up 22%, not 12%.

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