



The impact of Russian cultural suppression on Ukrainian national unity

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Abstract. The relevance of this research is driven by the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war and Russia's centuries-long attempts to destroy Ukrainian national identity through political, military and cultural mechanisms. The aim of the study was to analyse the historical and contemporary manifestations of Russian cultural suppression and its impact on Ukraine's national unity. The research reveals that the key mechanisms of Russian cultural suppression include language policy, religious control and the falsification of historical narratives. Russian efforts to impose the dominance of the Russian language, particularly during the Soviet period, were aimed at weakening Ukrainian identity. The research identifies key Russian tactics, including restrictive language policies, manipulation of religious institutions and the distortion of history, all intended to weaken Ukrainian identity. However, rather than achieving these goals, the Ukrainian language has emerged as a powerful symbol of resistance and resilience. The paper also highlights the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in shaping Ukraine's religious dynamics to Russia's advantage, as well as the ongoing falsification of Ukrainian history, depicting Ukraine as "Little Russia." The findings suggest that, in the face of external threats, Ukraine's cultural resilience has not only endured but also contributed to the strengthening of national unity. Efforts to restore historical accuracy and promote a more robust national consciousness have been pivotal in resisting Russian influence. These insights are significant for academics, educators and policymakers working to safeguard and promote Ukrainian identity in the context of ongoing geopolitical challenges

Keywords: cultural resistance; language policies; Ukrainian identity; intercultural communication; cross-cultural communication

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Introduction

The cultural landscape of Eastern Europe has been shaped by centuries of shifting borders, ideologies and identities; among the most complex relationships is that between Russia and Ukraine. Historically, Russia has sought to exert control over Ukraine and other neighbouring states through a variety of means, not only military and political but also cultural suppression. The efforts to weaken Ukrainian culture have had profound implications for the nation's sense of unity and its ongoing struggle for sovereignty, which is why understanding the impact of Russian cultural suppression on Ukrainian national unity is crucial as Ukraine navigates its path toward self-determination and European integration. Moreover, the historical context is also relevant today, as the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine underscores the enduring influence of cultural suppression in shaping national identity and resistance, making the preservation and promotion of Ukrainian culture not just a matter of heritage but of survival and geopolitical significance.

As set out above, the cultural dynamics between Russia and Ukraine have been deeply influenced by historical narratives and state policies, which is widely discussed in the academic literature. Thus, B.A. Düben (2020) critiques the Kremlin's interpretation of Ukrainian history, arguing that it aims to delegitimise Ukrainian sovereignty by framing the nation as a historical extension of Russia. He highlights the significance of historical manipulation in shaping public perception, emphasising the need for grassroots resistance against these narratives. This aligns with V. Feklyunina (2016) exploration of Russia's soft power strategies, which aim to foster cultural ties through the concept of the "Russian world". Both authors emphasise the impact of cultural diplomacy in asserting Russian dominance, yet V. Feklyunina also points to the resilience of Ukrainian identity, revealing a dual narrative of suppression and

resistance. Following these research results, it is further found in L. Gao (2024) and A. Wylegala & M. Głowacka-Grajper (2020) that Russian cultural suppression in Ukraine has been persistent, spanning multiple eras and regimes, from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union and into modern Russia.

Consequently, J.A. Green *et al.* (2022) provide a different perspective by situating cultural suppression within the broader context of international law and military aggression. Their analysis illustrates how Russia's actions are not only cultural but also legal violations, indicating a multi-faceted approach to undermining Ukrainian sovereignty. This legal framework contrasts with M. Hunder & C. Humphries' (2022) focus on religious dynamics, specifically the split between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its Russian counterpart. Their study illustrates how this schism represents a significant cultural and spiritual shift, further complicating Russia's cultural influence in Ukraine.

The described aspect reflects a cultural shift away from Russian influence, echoing V. Feklyunina (2016) findings on resistance to soft power initiatives. Although L.N. Leustean & V. Samokhvalov (2019) delve into the intersection of religion and national identity, emphasising the role of the Ukrainian National Church in countering Russian cultural narratives, their analysis complements M. Hunder & C. Humphries' (2022) research. Taken together, these studies underscore the necessity for further research on the implications of religious identity for broader cultural resilience.

It should be noted that much earlier studies of S. Ploky (2017) and O. Subtelny (2009), alongside the findings by A. Wilson (2022), provide comprehensive historical overviews, situating contemporary issues within a long-term narrative of Ukrainian identity formation. While they focus more on historical context, their insights into the ongoing struggle for

national identity resonate with the contemporary analyses mentioned above. The studied sources collectively depict a complex interplay of cultural suppression and resistance. They reveal how Russian strategies have evolved over time, yet they also highlight significant gaps in understanding the nuanced responses of Ukrainian society. This underscores the need for further to explore the intersections of history, culture and identity in the face of ongoing external pressures. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the historical patterns and contemporary manifestations of cultural suppression and how they have influenced Ukrainian national identity, defining the following objectives:

- to investigate the historical patterns and impact of Russian cultural suppression in Ukraine, with a focus on language policies, religious control and the marginalisation of Ukrainian history and collective identity;

- to explore the role of Ukrainian cultural resistance in countering Russian suppression, identifying the strategies and movements that have emerged to preserve and promote Ukrainian identity; and

- to assess the broader implications of these findings for understanding cultural suppression and national unity, considering the impact on policy and multiculturalism- entered educational efforts aimed at reinforcing Ukrainian identity.

Literature Review

To meet the above objectives and understand the impact of Russian cultural suppression on Ukrainian national unity, it is necessary to build a solid theoretical foundation that encompasses concepts of nationalism, cultural hegemony and identity formation. Several key theoretical frameworks guide this study, providing a structured lens through which to analyse the dynamics of cultural suppression and national unity. The concept of imagined communities, as proposed by B. Anderson (2006), suggests that a nation is a socially constructed community,

often bound by a common language, history and culture. This theory provides a useful framework for the present research and helps examine how Russian cultural suppression attempts to disrupt the Russian shared narratives and weaken the imagined community of Ukraine. Russian efforts to enforce cultural hegemony challenge the cohesion of Ukrainian society, making B. Anderson's theory pivotal in understanding the effects on national unity.

Regarding cultural hegemony and domination (Vike, 2011; Gramsci, 2020) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Hogg, 2016), A. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony is instrumental in explaining how dominant groups maintain control by influencing cultural and ideological systems, and social identity theory explores how individuals derive a sense of identity from their group affiliations. Russian cultural suppression can be seen as an attempt to establish hegemony, promoting Russian language, religion and historical narratives to assert dominance over Ukrainian culture. A. Gramsci's concept of hegemony helps to contextualise the methods used by Russia to control cultural discourse and marginalise Ukrainian identity whereas social identity theory is relevant when discussing Ukrainian national unity, as it highlights the significance of cultural markers – such as language, traditions and religious practices – in fostering a sense of belonging. Russian cultural suppression's impact on these markers can lead to a diminished social identity among Ukrainians, affecting the broader sense of national unity.

Next, postcolonial theory examines how colonial powers exert cultural dominance over subjugated nations, shaping their identities and histories (Said, 1979). This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of Russian-Ukrainian relations, where Russia's efforts to control Ukrainian culture resemble colonial practices. Postcolonial theory offers insights into how cultural suppression can perpetuate a colonial mindset, affecting the self-perception

and resistance of the suppressed group. With theories on collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Wertsch & Roediger, 2008), it is crucial to explore how societies remember and construct their histories. In the context of Russian cultural suppression, the manipulation of collective memory through the rewriting of history and censorship is a critical tactic used to undermine Ukrainian identity. Understanding how collective memory is shaped and preserved provides a basis for examining the resilience of Ukrainian cultural identity in the face of suppression. By grounding the study in these theoretical foundations, the research examines the complex dynamics of Russian cultural suppression and its impact on Ukrainian national unity. These frameworks offer a multi-dimensional view of cultural control, resistance and the ongoing struggle for national identity in a context where cultural hegemony and historical narratives are powerful tools for shaping collective consciousness.

Materials and Methods

To examine the impact of Russian cultural suppression on Ukrainian national unity, this study employed a literature review as the core method and a case study approach to illustrate specific instances of cultural suppression and the resistance efforts within Ukraine. The literature review involved analysing key academic sources, including dictionaries, and prior research on Russian cultural suppression and Ukrainian identity. Utilising methods such as analysis, synthesis, generalisation and systematisation, the study evaluated scientific literature on the topic. Sources were identified through databases and libraries, focusing on such keywords as “Russian cultural suppression”, “Ukrainian identity”, “the Orthodox Church in Ukraine” and “language policies”. Besides dictionary samplings for the purpose of linguistic analysis, the selected literature included works that explored various aspects of the topic such as V. Feklyunina’s (2016) exploration of soft

power dynamics and B.A. Düben’s (2020) analysis of Kremlin narratives, the literature review established a solid foundation for understanding the tactics used by Russia to undermine Ukrainian culture and their effects on national unity.

This process allowed the study to identify patterns of suppression across different periods and contexts, providing a framework for assessing the long-term impact of these actions on Ukrainian unity. The case studies focused on significant events and historical periods such as the imposition of the Russian language during the Soviet era, the Orthodox Church’s role in promoting Russian interests and contemporary attempts to rewrite Ukrainian history. These cases helped uncover the diverse tactics employed by Russia to suppress Ukrainian culture and highlighted the resilience of Ukrainians in resisting these efforts. Ultimately, the integration of these methodological components synthesised existing research and explored specific examples, offering a nuanced understanding of the ongoing challenges faced by Ukraine and the strategies used to maintain its cultural identity and national cohesion.

Results

The results of this study revealed a complex and deliberate strategy employed by Russia to suppress Ukrainian culture in general (Subtelny, 2009; Plokhly, 2017), with a particular focus on language as a means of control (Chayinska *et al.*, 2022; Chaika *et al.*, 2024). Historically, Russian authorities used language policies to enforce Russification, aiming to weaken Ukrainian identity and foster loyalty to Russian rule (Gao, 2024). These efforts spanned several centuries and intensified during the Soviet era, where the Ukrainian language was marginalised in favour of Russian. Moreover, “The Russian language retained its leading position in industry, tourism, sports, popular music and other domains as well as establishing itself as the main language of new important uses such as business, the internet and others”

(Kulyk, 2014, p. 124). The consequences of these policies were profound, leading to a significant decline in the use of Ukrainian in education, administration and public life (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of Russification policies in Ukraine and their impact

Period	Russification policy	Goals of the policy	Consequences for Ukrainian language and culture
Early 19 th century (1800s)	Ban on Ukrainian language publications (Valuev Circular, 1863)	Suppress Ukrainian language in education and literature	Limited development of Ukrainian literature and schooling; forced use of Russian in public life
Late 19 th century (1876)	Ems Ukaz (Decree)	Prohibit Ukrainian in print and performance	Banned use of Ukrainian in theatre, schools, and publications, stifling cultural expression
Early Soviet era (1920s)	Policy of Indigenisation (Ukrainisation)	Temporary promotion of local languages to gain support	Growth of Ukrainian language in education and media, but short-lived due to later repression
Stalinist era (1930s-1940s)	Reversal of Ukrainisation; Mass repressions	Enforce Russian as the dominant language	Ukrainian intellectuals were persecuted, Ukrainian replaced by Russian in schools and governance
Post-WWII Soviet period	Promotion of Russian as the “language of friendship” (1950s-1980s)	Create a unified Soviet identity centred on Russian culture	Ukrainian language use declined in favour of Russian in media, government and higher education
Soviet dissolution (1991)	Collapse of the USSR	Break from Russian dominance	Ukrainian declared the official state language, beginning of derussification efforts
Post-Independence (1991-present)	Ukrainian language reforms, including the 2019 language law	Promote Ukrainian as the official language in all spheres	Revival of Ukrainian language in education, media and public life; resistance to Russian influence

Source: author's development

As displayed in the above table, since Ukraine's independence, significant reforms have been introduced to reverse these effects, including policies aimed at promoting the Ukrainian language and undoing the legacy of Russification (Kulyk, 2014; Chayinska *et al.*, 2022). Thus, the relevant reforms when introduced aimed to reverse the effects of Russification and promote the Ukrainian language. Some of these include the below:

► Law of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic No. 8312-11 (1989), which, even before Ukraine's independence, declared Ukrainian the official state language, thus initiating the process of promoting use of Ukrainian in public administration, education and media. The

law initiated the gradual return of Ukrainian to prominence after decades of suppression.

► Constitution of Ukraine (1996) that makes the foundation for the Ukrainian identity. As the key achievement of the reform, it enshrined Ukrainian as the sole state language. That was a foundational step in asserting the dominance of Ukrainian in official and public life, setting the legal groundwork for future language policies.

► Law of Ukraine No. 5029-VI (2012) was to some extent found controversial, as it allowed regions where minorities comprised at least 10% of the population to declare Russian or other minority languages as regional languages. Although some regions adopted

Russian as a regional language, this law was anyway viewed as a setback for efforts to revitalise the Ukrainian language.

➤ Law of Ukraine No. 317-VIII (2015) included renaming streets, towns and cities that bore Soviet or Russian names and replacing them with Ukrainian names. They also banned communist symbols and propaganda. Moreover, with the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukrainian lands, more and more similar provisions have been enforced at various state levels. These reforms are part of a broader effort to undo the symbolic legacy of Russification and Soviet-era domination, further asserting Ukraine's cultural independence.

➤ Law of Ukraine No. 2704-VIII (2019), which reinforced Ukrainian as the sole state language, mandating its use in public administration, education, media and services. Since its enactment, all media outlets and educational institutions have been required to conduct their activities in Ukrainian. The law marked a significant push toward Ukrainian language consolidation and reversing the legacy of Russification, strengthening the cultural identity and unity of Ukraine.

➤ Education Reforms (2017; 2020), under which the 2017 law on education introduced a language provision requiring that Ukrainian be the main language of instruction in secondary schools, phasing out the use of Russian in education by 2020. The education reforms aimed to promote Ukrainian in the education system, particularly in Russian-speaking regions, as a critical measure to reverse the linguistic effects of Russification.

➤ Media and cultural policies have also strengthened the stance of the Ukrainian identity. For instance, quotas were introduced for Ukrainian-language content on television, radio and in cinema. In 2016, legislation mandated that a certain percentage of broadcasts be conducted in Ukrainian, with stricter requirements in place by 2021. Starting from 16 January 2021, certain provisions of the law "On

Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language" came into effect. From that date onward, all service providers have been required to serve and provide information in Ukraine in the Ukrainian language. These policies aim to ensure that Ukrainian becomes the dominant language in media and culture, helping to reinforce the national language in everyday life.

➤ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 852-r (2020) associates with the establishment of the Commissioner for the Protection of the State Language, tasked with monitoring the implementation of the 2019 language law and ensuring compliance. This office is expected to actively promote and protect Ukrainian in all aspects of public life, further reinforcing the language's status.

➤ Efforts in higher education and academia highlight that Ukrainian universities increasingly require Ukrainian-language theses and dissertations, while academic publishing has shifted toward prioritising Ukrainian. This approach emphasises the role of the Ukrainian language in scholarly and intellectual circles, reversing the Russian dominance in academia.

The description of the mentioned reforms forms part of the digital materials collected in the form of the Ukrainian legislation database used for research and that can be easily accessed online. They reflect Ukraine's determination to undo centuries of Russification, affirming its linguistic and cultural identity by promoting the use of Ukrainian in public, media and educational institutions. Another aspect of Russification noted in this research points to significant Russification efforts, evident in various aspects of language use, including vocabulary, spelling and even the structure of personal and place names. These efforts aimed to diminish the prominence of Ukrainian language and culture, resulting in a complex linguistic landscape that reflects the historical and ongoing tensions between the two nations. Historically, Ukrainian dictionaries have documented the

increasing incorporation of Russian vocabulary, particularly during periods of intense Russification (Iziumov, 1930). For instance, during the Soviet era, the Ukrainian language experienced an influx of Russian terms, especially in technical, political and social contexts.

According to the Russian-Ukrainian Academic Dictionary (RUAD), the following lexemes illustrate this trend: RU *большевизм* – UA *більшовізм* (RUAD) / EN *bolshevism*, RU *большевик* – UA *більшовік* / EN *bolshevik*; RU *-іцький* – UA *більшовіцький* (RUAD) / an adjective formed from the noun by means of suffixation, i.e. Russian suffix *-itsk* employs for derivation that will correspond to the Ukrainian suffix *-ytsk*; RU *комакадемия* – UA *комакадемія*, *комуністична академія* (RUAD) / EN 'komacademy, or communist academy'; RU *командарм* – UA *командарм* (-ма), *командуваць армії* (RUAD) / EN 'Commander of the army'; RU *комбайнстрой* – UA *комбайнбуд* (-ду) (RUAD) / EN 'combine-machine construction'; RU (capitalised) *Коминтерн* – UA *Комінтерн* (-ну) = *Комуністичний Інтернаціонал* (-лу) (RUAD) / EN 'Communitic Internationalism', where in Russian the term 'Internationalism' is the substantivized adjective (The *International*); RU *коминтерновец* – UA *комінтерновець* (-нівця) (RUAD) / EN 'Comintern member, or Communist International member'; RU *комиссар* – UA *комісар* (-сара) (RUAD) / EN 'commissar'; RU *комитетчик* – UA *комітетник*, (в главном управлени, гал.) *виділовий* (-вого) (RUAD) / EN 'committee member (in the main office, department)'; RU *коммунар* – 1) (член коммуны) UA *комунар* (-ра), (только вульг.) *комунець* (-нця); *артільник*; 2) (*коммунист*) *комунар* (RUAD) / EN 'a member of the communist party'; RU *коммунарка* – UA *комунарка* (RUAD) / EN 'a female member of the communist party'; RU *коммунизация* – UA *комунізація*, (о действии ещё) *комунізування*, *оконч. скомунізування* (RUAD) / EN 'communisation (referring to the action of communising)'; RU *коммунизировать* – UA *комунізувати*, *сов. скомунізувати*

когó, що (RUAD) / EN 'to communise' and its past participle RU *коммунизированный* – UA *комунізований*, *скомунізований* (RUAD) / EN 'communised'; RU *коммунизм* – UA *комунізм* (-му) / EN 'communism' with its respective phrases: RU *близкий к -зму* – UA *блізький (до) комунізму* (RUAD) / EN 'close to communism', RU *военный -низм* – UA *воєнний комунізм* / EN 'military communism', RU *заветы -зма* – UA *заповіти комунізму* / EN 'communism testaments', RU *исповедывать -низм* – UA *визнавати комунізм*, *признаватися до комунізму* / EN 'recognise communism, follow communism', RU *лозунги -зма* – UA *гасла комунізму* / EN 'mottoes of communism', RU *последователь -зма* – UA *визнавець комунізму* / EN 'communism follower', RU *проповедь -зма* – UA *комуністична проповідь* (RUAD) / EN 'communism sermon'.

Another notable part of the research addresses the findings under which the Russian terms *командирша*, *комендантша*, and *комиссарша* reflect a common tendency in the Russian language to use the suffix *-ш* when referring to women in association with male-dominated roles, particularly those related to military or administrative positions. This suffix often carries a derogatory or diminutive connotation, subtly undermining the authority or significance of the woman's position or status, especially in cases where it refers to the spouse of a commander or officer. The suffix *-ш* diminishes the sense of professional equality and often relegates women to a secondary role defined in relation to their male counterparts. In English, RU *командирша* can mean either a female commander or, more commonly, the wife of a commander, with the latter interpretation being more prevalent and often dismissive; Similarly, RU *комендантша* refers to the wife of a commandant, conveying a similar connotation of subordination. RU *комиссарша* is used in the same manner, with the *-ш*(а) suffix diminishing both the professional role of a female commissar and reducing the significance of the commissar's wife.

According to the RUAD, the Ukrainian lexemes are also found to utilise suffixation for the female nouns when derived from the nouns that denote male ranks and military roles, i.e. RU *команді́рша* – UA 1) *команді́рк[ш]а*; 2) (жена командира) *команді́риха*, (*па́ні*) *команди́рова* (RUAD); RU *коменда́нтша* – UA *коменда́нтка*, (жена коменданта) *коменда́нтиха*, *коменда́нтова* (RUAD); RU *комисса́рша* – UA 1) *коміса́рка*; 2) (жена комиссара) *коміса́ри́ха*, (гал.) *комісаро́ва* (-вої) (RUAD).

In contrast, the Ukrainian translations present much softer and more neutral alternatives. rather than employing pejorative suffixes, Ukrainian forms utilise gender-equivalent or possessive structures: UA *командирка* and *командирова* (commander's wife) are neutral and respectful, with the latter merely indicating the relationship, without reducing the woman's identity or authority. Similarly, UA *комендантка* and *комендантова* avoid the diminutive *-ш(a)* and provide a more neutral description. Likewise, UA *комісарка* and *комісариха*, or *комісарова*, respect the female identity while offering a possessive form for a commissar's wife, devoid of overtly negative connotations.

Despite the aggressive Russification efforts and the influx of Soviet terminology, the Ukrainian language maintained a more balanced and respectful approach to gender-related terminology, largely thanks to the influence of Ukraine's highly educated academic community. Under the pressure of Russification and Communist ideologies, these scholars worked diligently to preserve the inherent qualities of the Ukrainian language, resisting the imposition of pejorative or diminutive forms. By avoiding suffixes like *-ш(a)*, which often carried derogatory connotations in Russian, Ukrainian terminology offered a more equitable and respectful linguistic treatment of women in roles traditionally occupied by men.

This accomplishment highlights the resilience and dedication of Ukraine's academic

and cultural communities. Despite external pressures, they were able to protect and uphold the integrity of the Ukrainian language. Their efforts ensured that, even in the face of cultural suppression, Ukrainian remained a tool of equality and respect, in contrast to Russian, which through its linguistic structures often reflected and reinforced implicit gender biases. Although this stretches the scope of the research, it is worth noting how Ukrainian academia hypothetically resisted the Russification of both language and culture. When analysing the samples from the RUAD, two significant patterns emerged: 1) preservation of Ukrainian identity, and 2) resistance to linguistic overwriting.

1) Despite the systemic imposition of Soviet ideology, Ukrainian scholars made concerted efforts to safeguard the distinctiveness of their language. This is evident in the careful sequencing of terms in the dictionary, e.g. RU *браковáние, -кóвка* – UA 1) *бракува́ння, сортува́ння*; 2) *ган(ь)жува́ння, ганчува́ння* (RUAD) / EN 'rejection, sorting; defecting, flawing'; RU *браковáть* – UA 1) *бракува́ти, сортува́ти*; 2) (находить недостатки) *ган(ь)жува́ти (ганчува́ти) ко́го (щось) или ким (чим), ганьбува́ти ким (чим)*. [*На базáрі ганьд́жуютъ д́уже ці грóші, не прийма́ють. Дівчина веред́ує жениха́ми, – ганчу́є. Полотно́м купец́ь не ганьбу́є, хоч-би яке було́*] (RUAD); RU *брошю́ра, брошю́рка* – UA *брошу́ра, метелик* [*Тре́ба пустіти всі тво́ри М. Вовчка́ дешевими метели́ками* (Грінч.). *Путя́щої кни́жки, не метели́ка, дешевше як за три́цять-со́рок ко́пійок нема́* (Крим.)] (RUAD); RU *брошю́рный* – UA *брошуро́вий, метели́ковий* (ibid.) / EN 'brochure-like, butterfly-like'; RU *бу́лочный* – UA *бу́лочний, паляни́чний* (RUAD) / EN 'related to buns, related to traditional Ukrainian bread (palianytsia)'; RU *буль, бульбу́ль* – UA *буль, буль-буль, гел, гел-гел*. [*Пля́шку до ро́та та тільки: гел, гел, гел!*] (RUAD).

The first term was often a calque or borrowing from Russian, while the second was an

authentically Ukrainian equivalent. This allowed for the retention of deeper, historical linguistic richness and ensured that the imposed Russified terms did not fully displace native Ukrainian vocabulary. Moreover, the examples in sentences in their majority were authentic Ukrainian lexemes.

2) In some instances, the reverse pattern was observed, where the original Ukrainian term appeared first, followed by a Russified version. This sequencing subtly emphasised the precedence and legitimacy of Ukrainian terminology, signaling an intellectual resistance to Soviet efforts to overwrite the Ukrainian language with Russified alternatives, e.g. RU *брелок* – UA *дармові́й[іс](ик), брелок* (RUAD) / EN ‘free-hanger (a small object attached to something for decoration or identification), keychain’; RU *бри́тый* – UA *го́лений, бри́тий* (RUAD) / EN ‘shaved’; RU *бути́лочний* – UA *пляшкóвий, пляці́дний, бутелькóвий* (RUAD) / EN ‘bottle (adjective, relating to or made of bottles), flask (adjective, relating to or made of flasks), bottle (adjective, relating to or made of bottle-shaped containers)’ with the third one calqued from Russian.

Through these careful linguistic strategies, Ukrainian scholars managed to maintain the integrity of their language, demonstrating a sophisticated resistance to Russification. This trend is evident in the comparison of key Ukrainian dictionaries from different periods. The Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia, published in the 1970s, contained numerous entries that were heavily influenced by Russian terminology and conceptual frameworks. In contrast, contemporary Ukrainian dictionaries, such as the Modern Ukrainian Dictionary, aim to restore and promote indigenous vocabulary, often providing alternatives to Russian borrowings and emphasising Ukrainian linguistic purity. The described findings bring more value and increase relevance of the research as per literature review samplings, there has hardly been much study dedicated to the noticed phenomena.

In addition to vocabulary shifts, the Russification of Ukraine also manifested in the spelling of Ukrainian names. From scientific publications to digitally produced texts, the media are full of Russified Ukrainian proper names, e.g. names and surnames – RU *Иванов* (Ivanov) instead of UA *Іванів* (Ivaniv), which earlier literally meant Ivan’s [son]; RU *Игорь* (Igor) instead of UA *Ігор* (Ihor); RU *Кирилл* (Kirill) for UA *Кирило* (Kyrylo); names of cities, villages, territories etc. – RU *Киев* (Kiev) instead of UA *Київ* (Kyiv), RU *Харьков* (Kharkov) used for UA *Харків* (Kharkiv), RU *Львов* (Lvov) instead of UA *Львів* (Lviv) etc. As demonstrated above, many Ukrainian names and surnames underwent modifications to align more closely with Russian spelling conventions. This included the replacement of traditional Ukrainian letters with their Russian counterparts, i.e. the Ukrainian “Г” (h) was often replaced with “Г” (g) in Russian. Such changes not only affected personal names but also geographical names, as cities and towns were often given Russian versions that obscured their Ukrainian roots.

Recent studies (Snyder, 2010, 2018; Wylegala & Głowacka-Grajper, 2020) indicate that despite these efforts, the Ukrainian language has become a strong symbol of resistance and unity among Ukrainians. Moreover, from a perspective of religious control and cultural identity, the Russian Orthodox Church’s influence over Ukrainian religious institutions has been a tool for Russian cultural domination (Leustean & Samokhvalov, 2019). The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), particularly under the leadership of Patriarch Kirill, has been a potent tool of Russian state propaganda and cultural influence. This influence extends beyond religious teachings into broader realms of cultural identity, national allegiance and political ideology. The ROC’s close alignment with the Kremlin has made it a significant player in disseminating pro-Russian narratives, both within Russia and in neighbouring countries, including Ukraine. Next, since the Russian full-scale

invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the ROC's role in propagating Russian state interests has become even more pronounced. Russian religious leaders have publicly supported the invasion, framing it as a "holy war" and using religious rhetoric to justify Russian aggression (Chaika, 2023). This alignment with the Kremlin's agenda has further alienated Ukrainians from the ROC and highlighted the church's role as a mouthpiece for Russian propaganda.

The findings reveal that in Ukraine, this influence has taken various forms. Prior to the invasion, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) was closely linked to the ROC, creating a conduit for Russian ideological influence. Through sermons, religious ceremonies and community events, the Moscow-aligned Ukrainian Church often promoted pro-Russian sentiments and questioned Ukrainian sovereignty, echoing Kremlin propaganda. However, the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in 2019 was a pivotal moment, allowing Ukrainian Orthodox Christians to break free from Russian religious control (Mamo, 2021; Hunder & Humphries, 2022). This move has since played a crucial role in reinforcing Ukrainian national identity and unity, providing a religious institution that aligns with Ukrainian values and sovereignty rather than Russian interests.

Since the Russian invasion, the OCU has become a unifying force for Ukrainians, offering spiritual support and a platform for resistance against Russian aggression. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) has faced increased scrutiny for its ties to the ROC and its potential role in supporting Russian propaganda. According to publicly available sources, Ukrainian authorities have investigated church leaders suspected of collaborating with Russian forces, and public sentiment has turned increasingly against institutions perceived as supporting Russian interests. With that in mind, the power and influence of the ROC in Ukraine have become a double-edged

sword. While the ROC has used its religious authority to further Russian state propaganda, the establishment of the autocephalous OCU has served as a bulwark against this influence, fostering a religious and cultural identity rooted in Ukrainian sovereignty and unity (Kendrick, 2022). This divide reflects the broader struggle between Russian cultural domination and Ukrainian national self-determination.

Discussion

The literature review, serving as a foundational component of this research and complemented by case studies, has produced several key findings that align closely with the primary aspects explored in detail. This comprehensive analysis reveals significant parallels between existing scholarship and the research findings, underscoring the ongoing relevance of these issues in the context of cultural suppression and national identity in Ukraine. These similar findings round about language policies and national identity, religious control and cultural identity, resilience of Ukrainian cultural practices and impact of historical narratives (Leustean & Samokhvalov, 2019; Mamo, 2021). Regarding language policies and national identity, it is argued that the imposition of the Russian language over Ukrainian (Kuzio, 1998; Gao, 2024), particularly during the Soviet era, aimed to erode Ukrainian identity.

It is notable how resilience of Ukrainian cultural practices has developed under the circumstances. Despite decades of Russian suppression, Ukrainian cultural practices have endured and, in some cases, flourished (Wylegala & Głowacka-Grajper, 2020). Contemporary research indicates that the revival of these practices has played a significant role in fostering a sense of national unity, particularly in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine. This conclusion is reinforced with the findings as the legislative acts passed in relevant years focused on strengthening the Ukrainian

identity and looking into solutions of reviving the power of the Ukrainian language and culture in the east of the country. Finally, there is the significant impact of historical narratives, under which Russian efforts to rewrite Ukrainian history have been countered by a resurgence in Ukrainian historical scholarship (Fig. 1). These efforts have helped to rebuild a collective memory centred on Ukrainian identity (the efforts by the Ukrainian academia while working on RUAD) and has contributed to a greater sense of national pride and unity. The relationship between Russia and Ukraine has been deeply influenced by these historical nar-

atives (Chaika, 2024), with Russia frequently attempting not only to rewrite but also re-shape and misrepresent the Ukrainian history to global community, to legitimise its control (Düben, 2020). Key elements of this historical revisionism include the denial of Ukrainian statehood, marginalisation of Ukrainian culture and historical figures and whitewashing Soviet repression. Russia's attempts to rewrite Ukrainian history can be traced back to the Russian Empire and continued through the Soviet Union. The overarching goal has been to portray Ukraine as an inseparable part of Russian history and culture (Fig. 1).

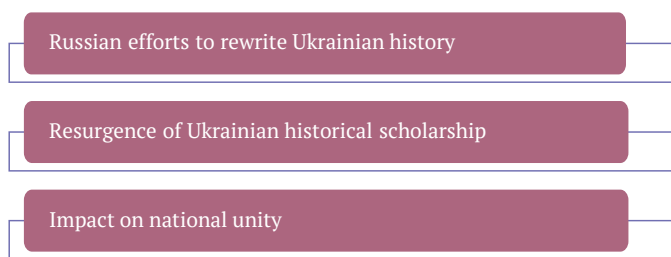


Figure 1. Impact of Russian historical narratives on Ukrainian unity

Source: author's development based on research findings

The Russian narratives have frequently depicted Ukraine as UA *Малоросія* (malorosia), meaning “Little Russia” and implying that it is a derivative or subordinate part of the greater Russian state (Chaika, 2024). The Ukrainian language was propagated to be a dialect or a derogative sign of communicants’ social class, i.e. low income / illiterate / uneducated class associated with rural population and disconnected from culture, aristocracy and intellectualism. This approach seeks to minimise Ukraine’s distinct identity and legitimise Russian control.

Consequently, Russian accounts of history often downplay the contributions of Ukrainian figures and emphasise Russian heroes, suggesting that Ukraine’s cultural achievements are inherently Russian. The current study revealed that figures like Taras Shevchenko or Ivan Franko, who symbolise Ukrainian identity,

are often overlooked or reinterpreted to fit the Russian narrative. Specifically, many Ukrainian identities have been appropriated by Russian narratives. For example, *Mykola Hohol*, born in Sorochyntsi, Ukraine (at that time the territories occupied by the Russian Empire), was a Ukrainian writer, whose name is often rendered in Russian translation and transliteration as *Nikolai Gogol*, following the Russification trend of the Ukrainian names and cultural artefacts. Similarly, *Illya Ripyn*, a renowned Ukrainian artist of the Cossack descent, with the nickname of UA *Pina* (ripa) ‘turnip’, had his name translated rather than transliterated into Russian, resulting in global reference to him as Ilja Repin, with the change in the root vowel, from ‘i’ to ‘e’ to conform to russification standards. Other examples include *Ivan Aivazovsky*, a Ukrainian marine and battle painter of

Armenian descent, born in Feodosia, Ukraine, occupied by the Russian Empire back then and *Arkhyt Kuyindzi*, a Ukrainian landscape painter and teacher of Greek descent from Northern Pryazovia, born in the village of Karasivka that is today part of Mariupol, Ukraine. Numerous other instances of appropriated Ukrainian identities have gained global recognition. For instance, the National Gallery renamed Edgar Degas' work "Russian Dancers" to "Dancers in Ukrainian Dress", an action widely covered in media (National Gallery renames..., 2022). According to Mariia Kashchenko, the Ukrainian-born founder and director of Art Unit, the comments on the renaming highlight that "the term Russian art became an easy umbrella term which was useful but it's really important now to get things right".

Furthermore, Russian historical narratives tend to minimise or justify Soviet-era atrocities, such as the Holodomor (the forced famine in Ukraine), the Great Purge and the repression of Ukrainian nationalism, aligning with recent studies (Richardson-Smith, 2021; Myshlovska, 2022). This historical whitewashing serves to obscure the devastating impact of Soviet policies on Ukraine and perpetuate the notion of a harmonious union between Russia and Ukraine. In response, Ukrainian historians, educators and activists have worked to reclaim their history and promote an authentic Ukrainian narrative. This resurgence in Ukrainian historical scholarship has had a profound impact on national identity and unity. According to the digital media and publicly available domains of official information by the Ukrainian authorities, the key elements of this effort include: (a) reclaiming Ukrainian Heroes and historical events, (b) recognising Soviet atrocities, (c) promoting national pride and unity, in particular:

➤ Ukrainian scholars have highlighted the achievements and contributions of distinctly Ukrainian figures and events in Ukraine's history that demonstrate its independence and unique identity. Examples include recognising

Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the Ukrainian People's Republic's short-lived independence in 1918;

➤ Ukrainian historians have drawn attention to Soviet-era atrocities, especially the Holodomor, which has been officially recognised as a genocide against the Ukrainian people. Acknowledging these events affirms Ukraine's right to a historical narrative that reflects the suffering and resilience of its people;

➤ The resurgence in Ukrainian historical scholarship has had a ripple effect throughout society. By educating the public about Ukraine's rich history and culture, this movement has fostered a stronger sense of national pride and unity. Public awareness campaigns, educational programs and national holidays now emphasise Ukrainian heritage and the ongoing struggle for independence.

The impact of reclaiming and promoting an authentic Ukrainian historical narrative has been significant. This process has helped Ukrainians to solidify their cultural identity and historical continuity, providing a foundation for national unity. Such an understanding of Ukrainian history acts as a counternarrative to Russian propaganda and has galvanised Ukrainian resistance against Russian aggression. Russian efforts often aim to portray Ukraine as a subordinate part of a larger Russian entity. Therefore, the research findings align with existing literature (Anderson, 2006; Motyl, 2011; Hogg, 2016) and highlight that this historical revisionism involves several key elements: 1) the denial of Ukrainian statehood, suggesting that Ukraine is merely a derivative of Russia; 2) the marginalisation of Ukrainian cultural figures and heroes, downplaying their significance in favour of Russian icons; 3) the whitewashing of Soviet-era atrocities such as the Holodomor, to minimise their impact on Ukrainian identity.

The resurgence of Ukrainian historical scholarship has had a profound impact, fostering a stronger sense of national identity

and unity. By confronting and correcting Russian historical narratives (Myshlovska, 2022), Ukrainians are better equipped to resist external threats and maintain their cultural autonomy. As discussed earlier (Halbwachs, 1992; Wylegala & Głowacka-Grajper, 2020), this revitalised collective memory has galvanised public sentiment, contributing to a more cohesive and determined resistance against Russian aggression. Ukrainians are reclaiming their history and creating a stronger and more resilient national identity that emphasises their independence and unique cultural heritage. Additionally, this resurgence in Ukrainian historical scholarship has inspired a new generation of Ukrainians who view their history with pride and determination. This development has not only enhanced national identity but also cultivated a more unified front against external threats. Ultimately, as suggested by M. Halbwachs (1992) and J.V. Wertsch & H.L. Roediger (2008), the effort to reclaim Ukrainian history demonstrates the power of collective memory in shaping a nation's future. It reinforces the idea that people who understand their past are better equipped to build a cohesive and resilient society. These findings suggest that while Russian cultural suppression has posed significant challenges to Ukrainian national unity, it has also galvanised a resilient and enduring sense of Ukrainian identity. The study underscores the importance of cultural resistance and its role in strengthening national unity in the face of external pressures.

Conclusions

The theoretical underpinnings and discussion of the research results suggest that, despite continuous threats to Ukrainian identity and transparent aggression by Russia in the ongoing war to conquer and defeat Ukraine, Ukrainian cultural resistance plays a crucial role in reinforcing national unity, especially when facing external pressures and threats.

Cultural resistance encompasses a wide range of activities, from the revival of traditional customs and language to the rejection of imposed narratives that undermine a nation's identity. By embracing their unique culture, Ukrainians have created a robust sense of community and solidarity, which has proven invaluable in confronting Russian cultural suppression and aggression.

It is underscored that through rigorous study, researchers can uncover the nuanced ways in which cultural resistance manifests and how it can be strengthened to fortify national unity. Furthermore, to effectively disseminate the findings of these studies, there is a need for broader platforms to share insights and stories of cultural resistance. This dissemination can be achieved through academic publications, public awareness campaigns and media coverage. Broadcasting the results to a wider audience not only educates people about the ongoing struggle for Ukrainian identity but also serves as a source of inspiration for other nations facing similar pressures. Ultimately, the goal is to foster a greater understanding of the importance of cultural resistance and its capacity to unite a nation, enabling societies to remain resilient and united in the face of external challenges. However, for a complete understanding of the dynamics of cultural resistance and its impact on national unity, more in-depth research and analysis are required. This entails a comprehensive exploration of how cultural practices, educational systems, religious beliefs and public discourse contribute to national identity. Additionally, it necessitates a critical examination of Russian attempts to rewrite history and the tactics used to suppress Ukrainian culture.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Вплив російського культурного утиску на українську національну єдність

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Анотація. Актуальність цього дослідження зумовлена триваючою російсько-українською війною та багатовіковими спробами Росії знищити українську національну ідентичність через політичні, військові та культурні механізми. Метою дослідження було проаналізувати історичні та сучасні прояви російського культурного придушення та його вплив на національну єдність України. Дослідження виявило, що ключовими механізмами російського культурного придушення є мовна політика, релігійний контроль та фальсифікація історичних наративів. Зусилля Росії з нав'язування свого мовного домінування, особливо в радянський період, були спрямовані на розмивання української ідентичності. Дослідження визначило ключові російські тактики, включаючи обмежувальну мовну політику, маніпуляції з релігійними інституціями та викривлення історії, що мали на меті послабити українську ідентичність. Однак замість того, щоб досягти цих цілей, українська мова стала потужним символом опору та стійкості. У статті також висвітлено роль Російської православної церкви у формуванні релігійної динаміки в Україні на користь Росії, а також триваючу фальсифікацію української історії, яка зображує Україну як «Малоросію». Отримані дані свідчать про те, що перед обличчям зовнішніх загроз культурна стійкість України не лише вистояла, а й сприяла зміцненню національної єдності та розвитку різних аспектів молодого культурного руху. Зусилля з відновлення історичної достовірності та сприяння зміцненню національної свідомості стали ключовими у протистоянні російському впливу. Ці висновки є важливими для науковців, освітян та політиків, які працюють над захистом та просуванням української ідентичності в контексті поточних геополітичних викликів

Ключові слова: національна свідомість; культурний опір; мовна політика; українська ідентичність; міжкультурна комунікація