

In Search of Heroes: Cultural Politics and Political Mobilization of Youths in Contemporary Russia and Ukraine

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Abstract: This article focuses on the implications of current political and socio-cultural processes for youth politics in post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine. The author briefly examines the dynamics in the developments underway within Ukrainian and Russian youth movements by looking at specific policies and tools of cultural propaganda aimed at Russian and Ukrainian youth today to engage them in active mass political participation at the national level. This article is an attempt to understand how the cultural politics of the states and the cultural activity of particular youth groups are incorporated and sustained in a powerful discursive framework of national and international politics. Key questions include: What young people enter politics in modern-day Russia and Ukraine? What political ideas do they hold? Is their entry in political life motivated by a special cultural vision? And, most important, to what degree are those ideas an extension of their cultural preferences and views? The author demonstrates a correlation between political and cultural motivations among Russian and Ukrainian adolescents. This is accomplished through distinctive models of youth participation in national politics to show how national cultural discourses construct political agency among young people because each discourse inevitably empowers particular youth groups. The author argues that although having similar agendas, Ukrainian and Russian youth movements are formed by different means of political propaganda that stem from different approaches to the formulation and articulation of the national cultural politics.

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In this article, I present a conceptual framework for the research on a topic that is still largely neglected by “serious” scholars, although it is becoming obvious that questions surrounding cultural politics, state policies, and the impact of those policies on youth movements in post-Soviet states should be researched in more detail. The successful role of youth movements in recent political battles in Georgia and Ukraine has advanced the subject, which is becoming an area of discussion and analysis in its own right. However, there is little accurate information about the scope of national youth movements, their ideals and leaders, purposes and sponsors, and tactics and strategies. Even membership numbers are elusive. It would be wiser to consider the recent spate of publications on youth politics and culture in these countries as interesting preliminary comments, based on a narrow selection of evidence that pays only scant attention to the structure and content of youth movements in both countries. At the moment, there seems to be different, but overlapping, ideas about the social roots of youth movements and the emergence of adolescents as powerful political actors in postcommunist Russia and Ukraine. The first assumption is that youth movements have attracted predominantly the most progressive young people—students. Traditionally, any student generation in Russia and Ukraine lasts five years, with its ranks always being refilled. The second assumption is that the post-Soviet milieu has expected that their young men and women—as distinct from their parents—inevitably embrace a new reality and change on the way to “settling down.” And finally, the third assumption—logically distinct from the second—is that the emergence of the adolescent as a self-conscious political actor was finally recognized in Russia in the course of the presidential campaign of 2004 in Ukraine. Although they were enthusiastically recognized by the public, the ruling political elite were much less willing to acknowledge them. In many ways, the “orange experience” has been increasingly conceived by young people in both countries as a “political coming of age”—a viable and preferable alternative of their social adjustment to the already established morale and order of transitional societies, in which adolescents have been largely marginalized and neglected during the 1990s. In reality, these assumptions remain untested by scholars, partially because the situation is relatively new and in a state of flux, and also because it would require a wholly different analysis from that which is used for earlier periods.

Although youth studies is interdisciplinary by nature, few studies of youth culture have pursued the issue of political association of particular youth groups in Russia and Ukraine during the late 1990s and early 2000s. There is some irony in that the Ukrainian situation has received very little attention from Western scholars in comparison to the bulk of research done on the Russian youth.¹ Moreover, it is still difficult to find any research that centers specifically on Ukrainian youth; rather, a “youth” aspect is faintly scattered in studies on economic and political issues.² As to the post-Soviet Russian youth culture, the dominant early

scholarship believed that the underlying forces behind it were shaped by mainly sociopolitical upheavals during the early 1990s. Today, several studies of youth culture provide useful overviews of the literature on specific issues, such as the Princeton Project on Youth, Globalization, and Religion (Russia and CIS)³ or one of the most recent comparative studies of risk factors influencing youth culture in Russia and Europe, which was conducted by a joint team of scholars from the University of Central Lancashire (Preston) and the Institute for Socio-Political Research (Moscow).⁴ Although many studies recognize the influence of politics on the development of youth culture, most are highly attuned to either examining earlier historical periods in the development of youth subcultures⁵ or exploring areas of interest of young people.⁶ The assumption remains, however, that after the dissolution of the Communist Youth League (Komsomol), young Russians and Ukrainians cannot be identified en masse with any particular political group where they have a chance to get actively involved in politics to express themselves and control their environment. In other words, their identities are politically amorphous, and for the latter reason, adolescents in a transitional society cannot be perceived as a viable political force.

Yet, any review of the current situation in Russia is bound to come to the conclusion that the events of the Orange Revolution, in which Ukrainian youth played a critical role, can be viewed today as a precedent for what might happen in Russia and other CIS countries in the future.⁷ This situation entails a complex set of ambiguities and contradictions to be looked at before saying that Russian youth can be influenced that much by a successful experience of their neighbors in such a short period of time. The first step in this direction is an attempt to analyze newly emerged trends in youth political movements in both countries, linking them to wider sociocultural processes that are underway in both Russia and Ukraine. In this article, I explore some links between the changing nature of Russian and Ukrainian cultural politics and policies aimed at young people specifically. I propose to show that the growth of youth regional or national organizations has been fostered, not retarded, by the rapid changes in national cultural politics of the late 1990s and early 2000s. By cultural politics, I imply the actions of state institutions whose tasks are the formulation and articulation of specific policies.

To say that there is a coherent cultural policy targeting young people emanating from national governments is too ambitious a statement. But there are some trends and phenomena that deserve scholarly attention to understand the dynamics and place of youth movements in national political life. Here, it is important to discover what cultural ideals today's young people share and what models of political behavior those ideals demonstrate. In other words, who are their heroes and why? As a preliminary remark, it should be mentioned that the administration of culture and youth policies in Russia and Ukraine has been similarly handled. At the same time, the assumption remains that Ukraine is a country with more liberal post-Soviet traditions determined by individual freedom, where culture tends to be considered a matter of choice and the state should intervene as little as possible. Indeed, the history of Ukraine's fight for its independence places it in a different category of states in contrast to Russia, whose demons and heroes

have always been contained by its imperial integrity. This must be kept in mind when approaching any comparative research on Russia and Ukraine, especially where it deals with the questions of ideology and culture.

A Revolutionary Rainbow: Ukrainian Youth in Colors

It seems logical to start looking at the Ukrainian youth movements for two main reasons. First, they have already demonstrated their high mobilization potential. Second, there are many today who advocate for the Ukrainian experience to be repeated in Russia. According to a newly born revolutionary tradition, there are two major camps in Ukrainian youth movements—the Orange and the White-and-Blue. Last year, the orange camp spearheaded the advent to power of a democratic pro-Western liberal leadership and thus actively supported an electoral bloc led by Viktor Yushchenko. The Pora (It's Time) movement became the most visible part of the orange: it united predominantly students from the western and central regions of the country, including the capital of Kyiv. As a present-oriented movement, Pora focused on the short-term goals in the run up to the presidential elections of 2004. It is not difficult to trace a history of Pora's precursors if we look back at the Ukrainian political reformist opposition and non-governmental (NGO) movements of the 1990s. Indeed, *Narodnyi Rukh Ukraïny* (People's Movement of Ukraine) (1989), *Narodna Rada* (People's Council) (1990), and *Zhinocha Hromada* (Women's Community) (1991) had been fighting for the restoration of rights of the Ukrainian language and political independence for Ukraine, as well as democratic freedoms for former political prisoners, religious and ethnic minorities, and antimilitarist and ecological activists, such as Ukrainian Catholics, the Crimean Tatar people, or the Association of Soldiers' Mothers in Ukraine.⁸ Pora was widely supported not only by sport-oriented youth organizations, such as *Plast*, *Sokol*, and *Tryzub*, which appeared across the country in the same period to follow national-patriotic and scout traditions, but also by some more radical nationalist youth organizations, such as the youth wing of Ukrainian National Assembly or *The Vanguard of Youth*, based in L'viv (western Ukraine), as well as by numerous loosely organized student unions scattered all over Ukraine. In some ways, this goes beyond social stratification, for the new student body was, by definition, an age group of youths, containing a large component of young people suspended in Ukrainian political space. The novelty of new Ukrainian youth student culture was threefold. First, there was little formal unity among the more than 180 youth student organizations (mainly based at the local educational establishments) before 2004. Second, Ukrainian youth had traditionally sided itself with the official Ukrainian political opposition, so the political orientation of adolescence had never been unclear.⁹ Thus, party-affiliated youth organizations tended to grow on the opposition side, for example, *Young Ukraine*, or *New Generation*, whose major slogan was "Give the young a chance!" At the same time, most student organizations were independent of any political alliance until recently. Starting in 2003, Ukrainian youth political activists deliberately recruited their politically inert compatriots in the eastern and southern regions of the country. It was an extremely difficult enterprise for young oppositional activists due to the pressure exerted by local authorities on students and student



FIGURE 1. Young faces of the Orange Revolution.

unions at local universities and other educational institutions. Third, Ukrainian young women had been actively involved in the reformist movement since 1989.¹⁰ The national priorities of the Ukrainian women's movement of the "first wave" (1989 to the mid-1990s), when feminism was perceived as the only ideological alternative to communism, were inseparably tied to the official political opposition. The Ukrainian political opposition had been instrumental to the process of collective identity formation in contemporary Ukraine.¹¹ According to Solomea Pavlychko, by the late 1990s, it became clear that a possible convergence of identities of "opposition-thinking" political groups with women's organizations seemed the only way of overcoming archaic discourses in Ukrainian society reproduced by the ruling elite at that time. Many of the women's associations were active political pressure groups with a pronounced patriotic element in their ideology, advocating for the continuation of the progressive traditions of the organized Ukrainian

women's movement, the assertion of democratic ideals, and the revival of national consciousness in Ukrainian society.¹²

Throughout the 1990s, Ukrainian youth usually opted for antigovernment protest actions and methods of peaceful resistance. In 2004, their tactics led the victory of the Orange Revolution and Viktor Yushchenko's accession to power in Kyiv.

The white and blue colors of Viktor Yanukovych's camp are somewhat subdued in terms of youth organizations that were directly involved in the events on Maidan.¹³ In fact, it is interesting why neither pro-Western nor pro-Russian camps used a yellow and blue combination of the national colors of Ukraine. One of the possible answers might be that the idea of Ukraine as an independent state had never been challenged in the course of the last presidential campaign, so the national colors remained intact—the national idea had been preserved in its purity. In hindsight, it seems wise for both camps not to claim the right to wear the national colors. On the other hand, the color paradigm of the Orange Revolution might be interpreted as the situation of uncertainty, or unfinished business with far-reaching consequences; that is, some group or individual at some point will claim national colors to be their own. The assumption is that the more young people are aware of the current political situation in the country, the better they will understand which movement they would like to join. At this time, all we know about the youth participation in the white-and-blue camp is that there were students and young workers among the supporters of Viktor Yanukovych in the Ukrainian capital last year. However, it can be argued that ideologically, Yanukovych's team was not ready to work with masses of young people specifically. To see a flawlessly organized mass youth oppositional movement was an awakening for the then-ruling President Kuchma, as well as for his favorites—the white-and-blue—who were portrayed by the media as a pro-Russian and nondemocratic political movement. In other words, adolescents were dissolved in the white-and-blue mass, and did not present a particular youth group. There is little surprise that the success of the orange "youth politics" has forced their opponents, who previously ignored youths as a political force, to act in a similar manner. As early as spring 2005, the white-and-blue organized two movements—Ukraina bez Yushchenko (Ukraine without Yushchenko) and Soyuz rozhdennykh revolutsiei (The Union Born in Revolution)—both having youth wings. For those familiar with Soviet culture, the latter immediately invokes an old Soviet epic from the late 1970s to early 1980s, *Born in Revolution*, which tells the life story of a heroic Soviet militiaman and his deeds, from the time of the Russian revolution to the Brezhnev period. But, the leader of "The Union Born in Revolution" is Alexander Khryakov, who is the chair of the Association of Entrepreneurs of the Donetsk region, and not a militiaman, which adds irony to the whole situation around this organization.¹⁴ As to "Ukraine without Yushchenko," I suggest that it is a replica of a new Russian youth movement, "Walking without Putin," which, in turn, was formed as a Russian oppositional movement under the influence of the Orange Revolution in late 2004. And again, the irony of fate is here, reflecting a reactive imagination of the white and blue. So far, it is unclear how influential these new movements might be in the future, but I think that their oxymoronic cultural roots will contribute little to their public popularity and political

success. In June 2005, Russian Ukrainians united in the coalition Rus' (Russia) that has become an umbrella organization for two political parties—Russko-ukrainsky souyz (Russian-Ukrainian Union) and Russky blok (Russian Bloc)—and the Russkoe dvizhenie Ukrainy (Russian Movement of Ukraine).¹⁵ The leaders of a new coalition, including Ivan Simonenko,¹⁶ declared that the major goal of this new political union is to strive to protect the rights of Russian-speaking Ukrainians as well as the Russian language itself. Although the Russia coalition is not a youth movement per se, I think that its culturally oriented agenda might be attracting young people from the predominantly Russian-speaking south and the Crimea. The “language card” is obviously a trump one in the hands of the antiorange forces, and there is little doubt that pro-Russian politicians can play it in the parliamentary elections of 2006.

Thus, the Ukrainian youth have found some guidance and leadership on both sides of the national political spectrum in the course of the revolutionary events of 2004, which in itself is an achievement. Previously, Ukrainian politicians cared very little about youth politics, and there was a fear that socially marginalized, ideologically disillusioned, and politically infantile young Ukrainians would turn toward questionable movements, such as religious sects, to meet their needs.¹⁷ It has also become clear that the relative strength of civil society in postcommunist Ukraine has infused ideas into national youth movements. In turn, the Orange Revolution has diversified Ukrainian society. The situation is still in flux today; the orange youth camp has been dissolved and is shrinking in the east and the south, while new coalitions are emerging in the capital and in the regions. Next spring, there will be an opportunity to test the validity of our assumptions about the strength and mobilization potential of new Ukrainian youth movements and organizations by watching them in the parliamentary election—a campaign that promises to be both vigorous and politically relentless.

Political Associations of Russian Youth after 2000

In contrast with Ukrainian young people, Russian youth have been less homogeneous in their political views and preferences. The spectrum of youth movements and organizations in Russia is very wide and diverse in its forms and content. Little scholarly research is found concerning the political preferences of Russian youth of the early 2000s. There are scattered facts that, nonetheless, show how socially active young Russians are today despite a negative influence of the bleak 1990s on them. For instance, Alsaker and Flammer's research has demonstrated that young Russians are the most interested group of adolescents (out of Western/Eastern/Central Europe, Scandinavia, and the United States) in having contact with foreigners.¹⁸ Here is another example from *Youth in a Changing Karelia: A Comparative Study of Everyday Life, Future Orientations, and Political Culture of Youth in North-West Russia and Eastern Finland*.¹⁹ Specifically, the following breakdown of responses given by Russian male and female groups to the statement “Politics is exclusively the business of men and women should be kept out of it”: only 16 percent of Russian women and 30 percent of Russian men agreed with that statement. Generally, in contrast to young Ukrainians, Russian



FIGURE 2. Revolutionary youth of Ukraine.

youth often tend to side with the authorities. For instance, a famous letter in support of the Moscow court decision during Mikhail Khodorkovsky's trial was also signed by I. V. Il'yin, a student leader of Moscow State University.²⁰

A brief overview of the multiple youth organizations in Russia brings us to the conclusion that the battle for Russian youth began long before the events of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. All major political parties and blocs in the Russian State Duma have had youth wings for a long time, and the work in this direction has intensified with the coming elections in 2008. Youth factions in the Duma include the Union of Right Forces (SPS) youth union, a Youth Communist League of the Communist Party of Russian Federation, and youth wings of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), Rodina, Trudovaya Rossiya, and others. Their history is similar in that all youth wings of official political parties were formed toward the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the need for new and preferably young members had to be satisfied to survive in the Russian political Olympus. Many of the youth party factions are elitist in their nature and use bureaucratic methods of party politics in their work with young people, for instance, SPS, Yabloko Youth, Nezavisimyi molodezhnyi soyuz (the Independent Youth Union), and the Russian Social Democratic Youth Union ("molodye gorbachevtsy") of Gorbachev's party. As a rule, these types of youth organizations are built on their parties' ideological platforms and have weak federal networks of their party committees. Apparently, their influence is often limited to Moscow and the students of

regional capitals. So, it can be argued that these movements have low or limited mobilization potential. Another type of youth party wings can be characterized by their focus on mass participation, strong party discipline, and methods of active propaganda. Politically, they are more radical and view their youth wings as an “ideological filter” for their future membership; for instance, the Youth Communist League of the Communist Party of Russian Federation has inherited the CPSU structure, the youth wing of LDPR has a tendency to have mass public actions accompanied by intensive political agitation, or the left radicals of the Vanguard of Communist Youth, who are better known as the “anpilovtsy” from Viktor Anpilov, the leader of Trudovaya Rossiya. These organizations have demonstrated their relatively high mobilization potential as well as their tendency to use trade union methods and tactics to spread their influence nationwide, for example, Rossiiskaya assotsiatsiya studencheskikh profsoyuznykh organizatsii vuzov (The Association of Student Unions of Russia), which is the youth wing of the party Rodina. According to some experts, this type of youth movement is formed according to a classical Bolshevik principle of *kuznitsa kadrov* (forgery of personnel).²¹

There are many more political organizations in which young people comprise a significant part of their membership, such as the National Bolshevik Party of E. Limonov (the “limonovtsy”), Anarkhisty Pitera (The Anarchists of Piter), Avangard krasnoi molodezhi (The Vanguard of Red Youth), Nash vybor (Our Choice), and so on. It can be argued that this type of youth organization, although seemingly similar to the first one, radically differs from the party youth wings; they are formed by an idealistic or sectarian principle that implies one specific idea around which the whole movement is built. In fact, very little is known about these movements today, as they tend to be more secretive than other youth groupings. Nevertheless, it is a reasonable assumption that their political mobilization potential is low and limited to certain youth subcultural milieus.

Finally, there are several newly formed youth movements in Russia, such as Molodezhnoye yedinstvo (Youth Unity), Idushchiye vmeste (Walking Together), My (We), Idushchiye bez Putina (Walking without Putin), Da! (Yes!), Ya dumayu (I Think), Nashi (Ours), and Oborona (Defense), scattered across the Russian political spectrum. Although some of them are presented to the public as nonpolitical associations of youth, the reality tends to force them to take sides, thus quickly absorbing them in Russian politics, where stakes are becoming too high to risk young votes. Today, it is difficult to assess the scope of influence and the mobilization potential of these movements, which are usually formed according to a “flock principle,” as Ilya Yashin maintains.²² All we know now is that almost all of them are heavily influenced by certain political ideologies and sponsored by some political groups. For instance, the so-called orange factor, which has been critical for We and Walking without Putin, formed in early 2005, whereas Nashi can be viewed as an official response to the orange pressure in the country. Obviously, the ultimate goal of these movements is to attract not only students, but also young working people. In other words, these movements tend to quickly grow in Russia’s regions, focusing on the political mobilization of urban and suburban youth. In particular, the increasingly militant activity of Nashi has recently attracted the atten-

tion of national and international observers.²³ At this point, Nashi, which was launched on March 1, 2005, is considered to be a new project of the pro-Putin youth movement Walking Together. It is no secret that Kremlin strategists designed Nashi to divert the “orange threat.” According to press reports, Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of the Putin administration, met with a group of thirty-five to forty young people, including Vasily Yakemenko, the leader of Nashi, in St. Petersburg on February 17, 2005. Ten days later, approximately two hundred youths arrived at a sanatorium outside Moscow that belongs to the presidential administration to attend what Yakemenko characterized as a conference on “Russia’s New Intellectual Elite,” but which actually appears to be Nashi’s founding congress. This summer, President Putin met with the leaders of Nashi to show his support to their cause.²⁴ It would be reasonable to suggest that the proregime Nashi will be growing in the near future thanks to the multifaceted support of the Russian federal government. In his many speeches, Yakemenko maintained that the main goal of his new antifascist movement is to put an end to

“The spectrum of youth movements and organizations in Russia is very wide and diverse in its forms and content.”

the “unnatural union of oligarchs, anti-Semites, Nazis, and liberals.” Infused with patriotic ideology, the “putinists” cast their opponents as mercenaries ready to put their motherland under foreign control: “We all should understand—the enemy is at the gates; the front line runs through each town, each street, each house.”²⁵ Obviously, *derzhavnichestvo* (the idea of a powerful and prosperous Russia and of her great power status) and the acute awareness of Russian national identity lie at the basis of the ideology of Nashi. As Yakemenko himself put it in his interview with *Izvestiya*, the members of his movement have a “thorough understanding of whom they should fight and how.”²⁶ The antifascist orientation of Nashi is reiterated by its leaders and has also surfaced in public debates about the rise of nationalist extremism in Russia today, but in a different context.

According to *Pravda*, there were between seven hundred and two thousand skinheads in Moscow, seven hundred to fifteen hundred in St. Petersburg, and up to one thousand in Nizhni Novgorod by the middle of 1998; the figures had risen to between thirty-five hundred and thirty-eight hundred in Moscow, up to twenty-seven hundred in St. Petersburg, more than fifteen hundred in Nizhni Novgorod, and one thousand in Yaroslavl, Pskov, and Kaliningrad by the end of 1999. For example, there are four skinhead organizations in Moscow: Skinlegion, Blood and Honor—Russian Affiliate, United Brigades 88, and Russian Aim. In all, there are approximately four hundred and fifty members. Interestingly, there is a small group of Nazi-skinhead feminists, the Russian Girls. St. Petersburg has its own gangs, such as Russian Fist (one hundred and fifty members), while there is the North group (one hundred and fifty members) in Nizhni Novgorod, and the White

Bears (eighty members) in Yaroslavl. According to Interior Ministry information, as many as twenty thousand young people may belong to skinhead groups, but there is no single organization.²⁷ The ideology of various Nazi skinhead groups has recently changed as they have been making recurrent attempts to work out unifying ideas based on Russian nationalism, anticommunism, antiliberalism, anti-Americanism, and anti-Semitism. However, Sergei Zherebin, the head of the Moscow Criminal Investigation Department's section for crimes committed by minors, believes that "there is no such skinhead movement" and goes on to call this idea a "myth created by the press." In his opinion, there are some substructures, but they are an attribute of youth fashion rather than a real threat to society. An analysis of the events linked with Russian skinheads' acts shows that the riots, beatings, and murders they commit are usually targeted at people from the Caucasus, Asia, and Africa.

A closer look at the rhetoric of the leaders of Nashi shows that antiorange and antifascist definitions are often used in their arguments as synonyms. Moreover, the ideological platform of Nashi is extremely vague, aimed primarily at the creation of its own positive image. At the same time, the "putinists" discredit the left and the right political opposition, thus confusing even the most ardent of Putin's supporters. For instance, Sergei Mironov, speaker of the Council of the Federation, openly distanced himself from Nashi at the meeting with the students of the Russian State Pedagogical University named after Gertsen: "Our youth is wonderful, and it shouldn't be fooled. Don't tell tales to our young people, don't tell them that the members of (Nashi and Walking Together) will become Russia's political elite."²⁸ In Mironov's opinion, Nashi can be easily turned into uncontrolled "ideological wolves." It should be noted that the ideological father of Nashi—Alexandr Nevzorov—has always been a radical and ambitious and opportunistic political activist with a wide and controversial circle of friends, including Yuriy Belyaev, who is an editor of the new pro-fascist newspaper *Nashe obozreniye* (*Our Review*; see figure 3).²⁹

In the future, I think it would be fruitful to study contemporary nationalist youth movements in Russia in conjunction with the usage of apocalyptic Web sites that discuss the crisis of Russian civilization and promote social fatalism. Equally interesting are the links between the nationalist and the religious youth movements and the response of the Orthodox Church to them. One overriding question is whether Nashi or any other official association of youths is leading or trailing the nationalization of youth political culture. Yet we know too little about rural Russia and the attitudes there to fully answer this question today. Only scant attention has been paid so far to the school that is one of the main promoters of social activism in Russian provinces. Equally, there is little sociological research done on life preferences of both young Russian and Ukrainian generations, their systems of values, and attitudes in life. Also, we lack the information about the role of youth organizations in local politics. Several studies have evaluated how the rise of states along ethnic lines has affected awareness of ethnicity, ethnicity-based tension, and risks in Ukraine and Russia.³⁰ Future scholarly research should explore young people's perspective on politics specifically. The recent spate of publications in press, for instance, reveals a pronounced tendency toward the growing militant attitudes



FIGURE 3. *Nashe Obozreniye (Our Review)*.

among young Russians and their extreme political agitation today.³¹ What can be inferred from the present tricky situation in Russian youth politics, however, is that there is a rise of nationalist ideology in Russia underway.

Young Heroes and Heroines, or the Fight for Tomorrow That May Never Come

“We should not whine, but instead understand that tomorrow will be better than yesterday.”

—Andrei Fursenko, Russian Minister of Education and Science³²

A brief overview of youth movements in contemporary Ukraine and Russia has revealed an interesting common feature—the lack of ideal types whose images embody the most essential national features and help search for meaning after the fall of Soviet systems of values. In other words, there are few recognizable national heroes and heroines who force young people to look within for the answers they seek and lead masses of youths through the rough seas of national politics in the future. According to Michael Christensen, post-Soviet youth culture can be characterized as “religiously rootless yet spiritually open.”³³ In this situation, it can be argued that adolescents are vulnerable to any manipula-

tion of their consciousness as well as any play with their subconscious. Since 1991, we have seen how Soviet conformism has been replaced by its new and more conflicting variety, defined by traditional forms of nationalism coupled with a post-Soviet cynicism in both Russian and Ukrainian societies. In such a harsh social environment, political agitation brings odd results that may have a diverse effect on society and its young generation. Here, a role of the emerging national symbolism, officially constructed in Ukraine and Russia today, is critical to understanding cultural roots of political propaganda aimed at adolescents in both cases (see figure 4).³⁴ Without this knowledge, any long-range youth politics and policies tend to be limited or inadequate.

On the one hand, culture is increasingly understood as part of public service in contemporary Russia. In March 2005, Russian journalist and political technologist Modest Kolerov was appointed as chair of the Directorate of the President of Russian Federation on Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries. It was President Putin who signed this appointment. In his interview with *Kommersant*, Kolerov reiterated a nationally popular idea that Russia has to actively protect its interests in the post-Soviet space and to tighten its links with compatriots and Russian-speaking populations in the newly independent states, including Ukraine. Most important, he mentioned that the target states are the directorate's major field of operations. What sort of operations? Apparently, cultural and ideological ones, if one looks at this directorate mission. The most recent example of that is the creation of a new Russian information channel, "Russia Today" (under the umbrella of RIA-Novosti), which is, according to officials, supposed to counterbalance the waves of negative information on Russia produced by Western media. Thus counterpropaganda is another of the directorate's missions.³⁵ According to Konstantin Kosachev, the creation of a "positive image" of Russia is a task of a paramount importance for the Russian government today in the "information war" that the West waged against Russia under Putin's administration. In 2005, a spin in the Russian cultural production has attracted public attention of the Western media. For instance, in February 2005, the *Washington Post* published an article about the shift in the Russian cinema toward a more "patriotic" version of new heroes—special agents and spies—which looked suspiciously familiar to experienced cinema-lovers who remember old Soviet movies such as *The Shield and the Sword*,³⁶ a romanticized version of a spy story and a war film in which a Soviet agent infiltrates Nazi Germany. In the same article, the author discusses the plans of the Russian Defense Ministry to launch what it calls a channel of "patriotic TV." A patriotic channel is supposed to show war documentaries and feature films to create "effective informational and ideological influences to ensure the social activities of Russian citizens," Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov wrote in a letter quoted by the financial newspaper *Kommersant*. Complaining about the negative influence of Western and Russian pro-Western mass media, Ivanov stated that the "moronization of the people must be stopped."³⁷ Indeed, the creation of legends and myths about the security services has become a serious business for Russian officials today. Why does it all matter?

It is important to note that this new project of Putin's administration looks like an enormous task—to build new images of the young and the strong in contemporary Russian culture to win the attention of Russian people, and particularly youth, whose votes may be a decisive factor in the next presidential election campaign. In fact, the campaign has already been launched on the national screen: the serials *Rodina zhdet* (*Motherland is Waiting*), *Spetsnaz* (*Special Forces*), *Likvidator* (*Liquidator*), *Agent natsional'noi bezopasnosti* (*The Agent of National Security*), and many others³⁸ re-create the Soviet and pre-Soviet Russian imperial past and fuse it with the controversial present to consolidate national consciousness in the face of a hostile and cold West that is again emerging on the horizon of a new Russian national ideology. The Agent of National Security is supposed to be the Shield for Russia in the twenty-first century. As to the Sword, according to the vision of new Russian ideologues, it must be alive to properly function. In other words, there must be young people willing to fight for the national cause who are as strong and incorruptible as Aleksandr Belov (a.k.a. Johann Weiss) in *The Shield and the Sword*—President Putin's favorite movie.

It may be argued that what we are witnessing today is a powerful project of writing a new Russian mythology based on a "strong past."³⁹ For many Russian politicians and artists, it seems to be a very attractive thing to do, considering the decay of the 1990s in Russian society, when "masters of culture" could not find "big" topics, did not see "positive" heroes, and could not offer the already disillusioned public any alternative to the "chernukha"—a post-Soviet version of classical Russian naturalism in art and literature of the nineteenth century mixed with



FIGURE 4. Russian youth politics: 2005.

Soviet “sots art” and Russian postmodernism of the late twentieth century. In the early 1990s, an elusive nature of nationalism was looming over Russia. Indeed, the concept of it has been vague up until 1998, when a decline of the Yeltsin era became obvious. From a historical perspective, that transitional period came to an end with Vladimir Putin’s accession to power in 1999. Since then, an amorphous national idea has started to slowly take shape, revealing the paradoxes of a Russian modernity. National cinema, to the critics’ great surprise, has been in the vanguard of the process of social self-knowledge. Moreover, the new autonomy of youth as a separate social stratum was symbolized by a phenomenon that had no parallel since the romantic era of the Great Patriotic War (World War II): the hero whose life and youth ended together, such as Danila Bagrov, a central image of Balabanov’s *The Brother* and *The Brother 2*, who has been “politically canonized” by both masses and intellectuals after the tragic death of Danila Bagrov (Sergei Bodrov Jr.) in the Caucasus. As many observers have noticed, Russian creative intelligentsia has become interested in politics, thus regrouping behind a powerful block of the patriotic bureaucracy after the economic collapse of 1998. According to Vladimir Bilenkin, it is apparently the intelligentsia that has been instrumental in uniting activists of the militant labor union Defense and several Moscow Marxist groups—young people, although already seasoned in the class struggles of the 1990s—to start The Movement for the Creation of Workers’ Party. “They are Russian postmodernists’ nightmare incarnate: a ‘meta-narrative’ of history in flesh and blood.”⁴⁰ The assumption remains, however, that both the Russian federal government and many political parties more actively explore multiple instrumentalities ascribed to culture as a medium for the management of youth masses.

Thus, what we are witnessing today in Russia and Ukraine are two powerful projects of forging their new national identities. I suggest that there is a fundamental difference between these two processes—Ukraine is involved in a painful process of constructing its new national identity, whereas Russia is aggressively reconstructing an imperial version of its national identity. In contrast to Ukraine, which cannot rely on its controversial past and in which it never existed as a modern independent state (except for a brief time in the early 1920s), Russia is consolidating its historical heritage, increasingly exploiting both Russian and Soviet symbolism. Moreover, today Russians do not debate their cultural roots, embracing both Europe and Asia, whereas Ukrainians are involved in a debilitating discussion about Ukraine’s cultural belonging that is constantly reproducing a discourse of insecurity in Ukrainian society. I argue that the project of identity formation in Russia is past-oriented, thus eliminating the problems of the present. Ukraine has opted for the much more difficult path of a future-oriented model of its new national identity, similar to the one currently under discussion in the European Union. The latter project is often counterproductive for the purposes of official cultural and political propaganda, because it does not allow the exploitation of already existing common collective symbols on a national scale. As a result, Ukraine experiences serious difficulties in formulating and articulating its new cultural policies and has very limited resources for cultural means of political propaganda. At the same time, Russian cultural production is dynamically growing in

many directions, thus providing material for ideologues of all stripes. Because of the growing importance of culture as a public sphere in today's Russia, the former is increasingly seen as "soft" power and used as a public space for political propaganda. There is an opinion that Russia has the potential to achieve not only economic but also cultural predominance in Eurasia in the nearest future.⁴¹ In short, Ukrainian construction versus Russian reconstruction is the pattern to look at in the future when comparing these two societies in terms of cultural politics and its political meaning. So far, a forward-looking conception of a collective Ukrainian identity has yet to be culturally articulated, whereas Russians rely on a more culturally distinct past-oriented model of their new collective identity and view it as their response to the challenges of a new century.

Today, it is more than clear that the dynamics of cultural politics in Russia and Ukraine implies a wide participation of youths on all sides of the political spectrum in both societies. Thus, it is worth examining the trends in structure and content of the youth movements, this time with more figures and data, without which any research on this topic is bound to make inaccurate assumptions. It can also be concluded that the search for heroes and national ideals of young people would take more time and effort than any politician would wish. I suggest that the politicians' temptation to offer their versions of ideal types and to foster the cultural production of the latter would remain in national politics, too. In some ways, this process may be viewed as the process of "governmentalization" of national cultures.⁴² In further research, I think, the focus of critical evaluation of national cultural policies should be on the means of official and party cultural propaganda and practices of youth participation in emergent politics. Expanding Douglas Holmes's arguments about broad latitude for political maneuver of new social democratic frameworks in contemporary Europe⁴³ and transferring this idea into the realm of Russian and Ukrainian cultural and youth politics, there are similar questions to be asked. In particular, for both societies, the following questions should be addressed: can diverse political youth orientations be successfully mediated over time with these new pluralist, yet predominantly nationalist, frameworks? At what point do the requirements of political mobilization clash with the interests of collective youth identities? Can political mobilization, derived from cultural preoccupations of youths, address deep-rooted problems of nation building in post-Soviet societies?

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NOTES

1. See, for instance, Avigdor Klingman et al., "Adolescents' Response to Nuclear Threat: Before and After the Chernobyl Accident," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 20, no. 5 (1991): 519–30; John P. Robinson et al., "Changing Perceptions of Societal Problems among Soviet Youth," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 14, no. 4

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2. See John P. Robinson, Robert T. Ger, Erjan Kurbanov, Stephen McHale, and Ivan Slepnev, "Ethnonationalist and Political Attitudes among Post-Soviet Youth: The Case of Russia and Ukraine," *Political Science and Politics* 26, no. 3 (1993): 516–21; W. Reisinger, A. H. Miller, V. L. Hesli, and K. Maher Hill, "Political Values in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania: Sources and Implications for Democracy," *British Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 2 (1994): 183–223; James L. Gibson, "The Resilience of Mass Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes in the Nascent Russian and Ukrainian Democracies," in *Political Culture and Civil Society in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. Vladimir Timaneanu, 53–111 (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995); A. H. Miller, V. L. Hesli, and William M. Reisinger, "Comparing Citizen and Elite Belief Systems in Post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1995): 140; Nikolay Churilov and Tatyana Koshechikina, "Public Attitudes in Ukraine," in *Perceptions of Security: Public Opinion and Expert Assessments in Europe's New Democracies*, ed. Richard Smoke, 189–208 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); L. Barrington, "The Geographic Component of Mass Attitudes in Ukraine," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 38, no. 10 (1997): 601–14; S. L. Wolchik and V. Zviglyanich, *Ukraine: The Search for a National Identity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

3. Michael J. Christensen, with Brian Madison, Elena Stepanova, and Vsevolod Milman, "Princeton Project on Youth, Globalization and Religion (Russia and CIS): Literature Review," <http://www.ptsem.edu/iy/downloads/Christen2.PDF>.

4. Christopher Williams, Vladimir Chuprov, and Julia Zubok, *Youth, Risk and Russian Modernity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

5. See, for instance, Anne E. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

6. David Gillespie, *Russian Cinema* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2003).

7. For example, on March 25, 2005, students from Baku State University and the State Oil Academy announced the creation of the Orange Movement of Azerbaijan. The founders of that movement are not members of any political party. They expressed their opposition to the present Azerbaijani leadership, and they pledged to support the three-party opposition election alliance forged in 2005 between the Musavat party, the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, and the progressive wing of the divided Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (AXCP). Membership in the Orange Movement is open to anyone under twenty-five years of age. Liz Filler, "Azerbaijani Youth Movements Seek Identity," *RFE/RL*, <http://www.rferl.org/specials/youth/archive/LF-azeri.asp>.

8. See, for instance, Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, "Women's Organizations in Independent Ukraine: Prospect of Power, Lecture I," in *Eastern European Perceptions and Perspectives* (Manitoba: J. B. Rudnyckyj Distinguished Lecture Series, 1997); Olexiy Holobutsky, "Waiting for Godot," *NGONet*, Spring/Summer 2002.

9. See, for instance, the magazine *Moloda diplomatiya*, published by the Student Union of the Faculty of International Relations at the L'viv National University named after Ivan

Franko, Ukraine.

10. For example, the Women's Union (Souiz Ukrainok), Confederation of Women of Ukraine (Spilka Zhinok Ukrainy), and Olena Teliha Association (Asotsiia Oleny Telihy). Solomea Pavlychko, a prominent Ukrainian scholar and public activist, became a public face of new Ukrainian feminists.

11. In her "Women's Discordant Voices in the Context of the 1998 Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine" (see Anna Bull, Hanna Diamond, and Rosalind Marsh, ed., *Feminisms and Women's Movements in Contemporary Europe* [New York: Macmillan, 2000]), Solomea Pavlychko explores the changes in political participation of Ukrainian feminists, who made recurrent attempts to organize themselves into a united electoral bloc to get more power at the institutional level and to combat the deep cultural conservatism of Ukrainian women, especially in the rural regions of the country.

12. See Bohachevsky-Chomiak, "Women's Organizations in Independent Ukraine."

13. Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square)—a central square in Kyiv, where the major events of the Orange Revolution took place.

14. "Na Ukraine poyavilos' novoye dvizheniye—"Ukraina bez Yushchenko," *NewsInfo*, April 8, 2005.

15. Ilyz Zhegulev, "Na Ukraine zapakhlo Rus'yu," *Gazeta.ru*, June 14, 2005.

16. Ivan Simonenko became a leader of the Russian-Ukrainian Union in 1997.

17. See Holobutsky, "Waiting for Godot."

18. See Françoise D. Alsaker and August Flammer, eds., *The Adolescent Experience: European and American Adolescents in the 1990s* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998), 138–39.

19. Vesa Puuronen, Pentti Sinisalo, Irina Miljukova, and Larissa Shvets, eds., *Youth in a Changing Karelia: A Comparative Study of Everyday Life, Future Orientations and Political Culture of Youth in North-West Russia and Eastern Finland* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 222.

20. See <http://khodorkovsky.ru/society/statements/2889.html>.

21. See Ilya Yashin, "Molodezhnye organizatsii v RF: metody formirovaniya," *The Forum of the Congress of Socialist Youth*; "Youth Yabloko," <http://www.ksm.vkpb.info/forum/index.php> (April 13, 2004).

22. Ibid.

23. See "Nashi podderzhat preemnika Putina," *Dni.ru*, June 27, 2005; "O chem mechtaet rossiiskaya molodezh'?" *RIAN*, July 13, 2005; "Rossiyane podderzhivayut nashikh," *Dni.ru*, August 18, 2005; D. El'kin, "Molodye volki liberalizma," *APN*, August 23, 2005.

24. See *Kommersant*, February 17 and 28, 2005; "Rossiyane podderzhivayut nashikh," *Dni.ru*, August 18, 2005.

25. Vladislav Surkov, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, September 29, 2004.

26. See Vasily Yakemenko, interview, *Izvestiya*, March 2, 2005.

27. "Skinheads in Russia: Who Are They?" *Pravda*, August 6, 2003.

28. D. El'kin, "Molodye volki liberalizma," *APN*, August 23, 2005.

29. Alexey Merionov, "Bredovo poboishie: Malodesh delaet politiku dubinkame," *Moskovsky Komosomolets*, August 31, 2005.

30. See Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*; Williams, Chuprov, and Zubok, *Youth, Risk and Russian Modernity*.

31. See, for instance, S. I. Grigoriev, "17-letnie Rossiyane 97: sochetanie liberalnyh i antiliberalnyh orientatsiy," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya* 8 (1998); D. L. Konstantinovskii, *Molodezh' 90-kh: Samoopredelenie v novoi real'nosti* (Moscow: Tsentr Sotsiologii obrazovaniya RAO, 2000); V. T. Lisovskii, *Molodezh': Tendentsii sotsial'nykh izmenenii* (Izd. St. Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2000); V. I. Chuprov, Yu. A. Zubok, and K. Vil'yams, *Molodezh' v obshchestve riska* (Moscow: Nauka, 2001); Yelena Komarova, *Revolyutsionnaya situatsiya* (Moscow: Moskovskiyevosti, 2004); Fr. Mereu, "Youth Groups Say the Time Has Come to Oppose Putin," *St. Petersburg Times*, March 1, 2005; I. Torbakov, "Putin's 'Walking Together' Movement Comes Up Short," *Journal of Turkish Week-*

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32. *Russian Life* 48, no. 3 (May/June 2005): 7.

33. See note 3.

34. Tatyana Maslova, *Kompromat.ru*, <http://www.kompromat.ru/main/marginaly/nashi.html> (accessed July 8, 2005).

35. See the interview of Konstantin Kosachev, head of the State Duma Committee on International Politics, at <http://www.bbcussian.com/>.

36. See Peter Finn, "In Russia, a Pop Culture Coup for the KGB," *Washington Post Foreign Service*, February 22, 2005, C01.

37. *Ibid.*

38. For instance, *Erast Fandorin*, a series of novels by Boris Akunin, and their film versions *The Winter Queen* (2003), *Turkish Gambit* (2004), and so on.

39. The expression belongs to the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov.

40. See Vladimir Bilenkin, 1997 Conference on Contemporary Marxism in Moscow.

41. Fiona Hill, "Russia's Newly Found 'Soft Power,'" *Globalist*, August 26, 2004.

42. Similar debates on culture, policy, and subsidiary are currently underway in the European Union. See, for instance, M. Farrell, S. Fella, and M. Newman, eds., *European Integration in the 21st Century* (London: Sage, 2002), specifically Enrique Banus, "Cultural Policy in the EU and the European Identity," 158–83 and Christina Julios, "Towards a European Language Policy," 184–201; Maurice Roche, "Citizenship, Popular Culture, and Europe," in *Culture and Citizenship*, ed. N. Stevenson, 74–98 (London: Sage, 2001); J. Peter Burgess, ed., *Cultural Politics and Political Culture in Postmodern Europe* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997).

43. Douglas R. Holmes, *Integral Europe: Fast Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Facism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 97.