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Pål Kolstø

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Ukrainians and Russians as ‘One People’: An Ideologeme and its Genesis

PÅL KOLSTØ 

University of Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT Vladimir Putin has numerous times claimed that ‘Ukrainians and Russians are one people’; this was part of the legitimization for the attack on Ukraine in February 2022. This article examines the prehistory of this claim in Russian nationalist thinking both in recent times and in the tsarist era. It is argued that the claim differs from and is more sinister than the pre-revolutionary idea of a ‘triune Russian nation’ consisting of Great Russians, Little Russians (= Ukrainians) and Belarussians, for the simple reason that the term ‘Russians’ (*russkie*) does not refer to the same group of people in the two contexts.

Introduction

In September 2022, the Russian occupying forces organised a ‘referendum’ in Kherson and Zaporizhzhya, two Ukrainian oblasts which were partially under their control. In preparation for this event, billboards were put up in Kherson proclaiming the Russians and the Ukrainians to be ‘One People’ (RFERL, 2022). This slogan was taken from an article posted by the Russian President Vladimir Putin fourteen months earlier, on 12 July 2021, on the Kremlin’s official website (Putin, 2021b).

Many people who took the time and effort to read this text at the time it was published, in the western world at least, probably dismissed it as bizarre and not to be taken seriously; after all, everyone ‘knows’ that Ukrainians and Russians are separate peoples. Today, after the events of 24 February 2022, it is clear that the language used in this text was part of the Kremlin’s ideological preparation for the attack on Ukraine half a year later.

But where does this ‘one people’ claim come from? In fact, it has a rather long pedigree, as an accepted (but also disputed) notion in Russian identity debates in the nineteenth century, and a crucial element of Tsarist nationality policy. It is also the staple component in Russian nationalist thinking after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin is simply reviving ideas that have been circulating for a long time. And although we may find the claim of unity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples outlandish, in many quarters of Russia it is taken for granted to the extent that those writing about it often do not deem it necessary to provide further justification or explanation.

Correspondence Address: Email: pal.kolsto@ilos.uio.no

In the Soviet Union there was no talk of Russians and Ukrainians being ‘one nation’: they were presented as ‘brothers’—*bratskie narody*—just as all the other Soviet nations were ‘brotherly people’. Also Putin has on numerous occasions claimed that Ukrainians and Russians are ‘brothers’. One might perhaps think that these are two related metaphors, but in my view, they are definitely not. Taken literally, the claim that Ukrainians and Russians are ‘one people’ would mean that the Ukrainians do not exist as a separate nation at all: they are merely one of many subgroups in the Russian nation, like the Pomors by the White Sea and the Sibriaks in Siberia. ‘Brothers’ can live in separate houses, indeed, in different countries, but if they are indistinguishable, they cannot be separated.

It may seem puzzling that the ‘One People’ rhetoric could function as an ideological preparation for the events of February 2022. After all, that would mean that the Russians have attacked their own people. Why would you want to attack yourself? But this claim is combined with another: in 2014, the Ukrainian state had been taken over by neo-Nazis, acting in cahoots with western leaders (in particular in Washington DC), who engineered the toppling of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. Therefore, according to the Russian narrative, the war is a war of liberation.

The ‘Ukrainian question’ has played an enormous role in Russian nationalist thinking for centuries, right up to the present. Russian bookstores are teeming with books on Ukraine and the Ukrainians conveying clear nationalist messages.¹ Titles include ‘Ukraine and the rest of Russia’,² ‘Ukraine is Russia’,³ ‘Ukraine, the anatomy of a catastrophe’,⁴ etc. Much of this literature is undistinguished, but some of it is penned by leading nationalists of various hues, such as Alexander Dugin, Alexander Prokhanov, Egor Kholmogorov, and Nikolai Starikov. These publications not only prepared the Russian public for Putin’s July 2021 message, but also make up an important part of the (quasi)intellectual environment which made his article on Ukrainian-Russian unity possible.

In this article I first trace the historical antecedents of the ‘one people’ notion in pre-revolutionary Russian discourse, before I turn to the contemporary context: modern Russian nationalist writings on this topic. Finally, I will return to President Putin and examine how he uses this ideogeme, and in which contexts.

Perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian Nexus Prior to 1917

A number of factors influence the development of ethnic and national identities, among the most important of which are religion, language, and political borders (Smith, 1991). They do not determine the construction of identity, neither separately nor jointly but are crucial identity markers or diacritica that can be used by ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’ and ‘nation builders’ (Kolstø, 2022; Wimmer, 2013). The salience of each marker may differ over time, reflecting changing circumstances (Kolstø, 2023).

In the processes leading up to the differentiation between the contemporary Russian and Ukrainian nations, political borders have played a crucial role. The Mongolian conquests of the thirteenth century divided the Kyivan Rus lands between those principalities in the north-east that ended up under Mongol-Tatar suzerainty and the East Slav territories in the south and west that became parts of successive central European states: the Lithuanian-Rus’ Commonwealth in the fourteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian state—the *Rzeczpospolita*—in the sixteenth century and the Habsburg monarchy after the partitions of Poland

in the eighteenth century. In that way, substantial portions of the Orthodox East Slav population for hundreds of years not only lived outside the realm of the Moscow Tsar, but also had very little contact with their co-religionists in that state. While they were all Orthodox, the East Slav Orthodox living outside Muscovy/the Russian empire were exposed to very different cultural stimuli, stemming from Catholic Europe. At the end of the sixteenth century, parts of the Orthodox population in the Polish Commonwealth accepted a union with the Pope in Rome, while retaining their separate church structure, liturgy, and identity as 'Greek-Catholics' or 'Uniates'. Their East Slav language also differentiated them from the dominant nationality in the Rzeczpospolita, the Roman Catholic Poles. Some of them, the Zaporizhzhian Cossacks, also had their own semi-autonomous political structures in the south-east of the Polish Commonwealth, the Hetmanate Sich. This also greatly contributed to the retention of a separate East Slav identity.

The East Slav populations outside Muscovy/the Russian empire were referred to as 'Ruthenians' (*Rusiny*) or 'Little Russians' (*Malorusy* or *Malorosy*). Both ethnonyms derived from the name of the (Kyivan) Rus' and were often used interchangeably. The epithet 'malo' or 'small' in *Malorusy* was a calque from the Greek name for the parts of the Kyivan Rus that were located outside Muscovy: 'Little Rus'—while the realm of the Moscow Tsar the Greeks called 'Great Rus'. Thus, the names of the regions had purely geographical origins and did not denote either the prestige or the size of the groups residing within them. A similar situation can be found in Poland, where the southern territories around Krakow are often referred to as *Małopolska* or 'Little Poland', in contrast to 'Greater Poland' further north in the region.⁵ Another name in use for the region was *Ucraina*, or *Ukraina*, which derived from a word for 'Outskirts' (of Poland). This latter name seems to have been preferred by the Cossacks, but as yet no ethnonym was derived from it (Plokhy, 2010, p. 299).

As a result of the Cossack rebellion against the Poles in 1648 and the Andrusovo truce in 1667, large parts of the East Slav population in the Rzeczpospolita became subjects of the Muscovy Tsar, and identity dynamics were drastically altered: the 'Constituting Other' for the Ruthenians/Malorusians was no longer the Poles but the 'Great Russians'.⁶ For religious reasons, the cultural distance between the 'Little Russians' and the 'Great Russians' was somewhat smaller than between the 'Ruthenians'/'Little Russians' and the Poles, and Muscovy nation-builders worked hard to amalgamate the two groups. Initially, intellectual circles in Kyiv (parts of the 'Little Russian' elite), were among the most active in the nation-building process. Having been exposed to Catholic learning, the 'Little Russians' could at the time boast a culture of more learning than Moscow, and exported a stream of erudite scholars and churchmen to Moscow, where they influenced the development of statecraft and state culture under the Tsars Aleksei Mikhailovich and his son Peter I (the Great). Thus, the first impetus for the notion of a unified 'Great Russian'—'Little Russian' nation (*narod*) seems to have originated in Kyiv rather than in Moscow.

In 1674, an important textbook of Russian history with the title *Synopsis* was published in Kyiv. It went through numerous editions and printings and became the most popular historical work in the pre-modern Russian empire (Plokhy, 2010, p. 259). The book was anonymously authored but hailed from the intellectual circles around the Cave Monastery in Kyiv.⁷ One of the important messages conveyed by the *Synopsis* was that the 'Little Russians' and the 'Great Russians' made up two branches of a common Slavo-Russian nation (*slavenorossiyski narod*). 'Behind the concept of a Slavo-Russian nation stood the idea of

a much closer unity of Ruthenians and Muscovites than anything envisioned earlier' (Plokyh, 2010, p. 261).

The concept of one nation (*narod*) uniting Ruthenians and Muscovites was a revolutionary element introduced by the author of the *Synopsis* to the field of early modern Slavic ethnology ... [T]he concept of the national unity of the Rus' lands and peoples was advanced after centuries of separate existence and diverse political and cultural experiences [that] had in fact created two very different political and cultural entities on the territories of the former Kyivan realm. (Plokyh, 2010, pp. 263–264)

Only with the advent of 'the age of nationalism' in the mid-nineteenth century did the notion of a separate Ukrainian identity appear on the political agenda in Tsarist Russia. Compared to most countries in western Europe, the Russian empire modernised late. In the nineteenth century, the vast majority of the population could not read or write in any language, be it Russian, Ukrainian or any other. Identities were local and parochial rather than national (Wilson, 2000, pp. 78–79). The Tsarist state saw Polish rather than Ukrainian separatism as the greatest threat, and the two major Polish rebellions in 1830–1831 and in 1863–1864 showed that these fears were not unfounded. Some officials in St. Petersburg supported the development of a 'Little Russian' language and culture to stem Polonisation in the south-western provinces (Hillis, 2013, p. 55; Wilson, 2000, p. 81). It was assumed that a regional 'Little Russian' patriotism could be an integrated part of the conception of an all-Russian nation (Miller, 2003, p. 27).

However, around the time of the second Polish uprising there was a clear change in attitudes among the Russian public. In October 1861, the historian Vladimir Lamanskii published an article in Ivan Aksakov's slavophile newspaper *Den* in which he claimed that 'Little Russians, Great Russians and White Russians, for all their differences, form a single Russian nation, a single Russian land, inextricably united by common faith and civil institutions' (quoted in Miller, 2003, p. 87). If that unity was broken, it would lead to the 'decomposition of the Russian nation' (Miller, 2003). Similar views were expressed by some Ukrainians who self-identified as 'Little Russians', such as S.S Gogotskii, a professor at Kiev University: '[w]e should support the idea of the triune Russian nation, otherwise the Liakhi [the Poles] will immediately destroy it, or at the very least suppress and assimilate [the "Little Russian" people]' (quoted in Miller, 2003, p. 88).

More than anything else, then, the Polish question informed the position of the Tsarist state on the Ukrainophile movement. They did not fear a separate Ukrainian uprising but that the Poles would be able to recruit 'Little Russians' and 'White Russians' to their cause. As Serhii Plokyh has remarked (Plokyh, 2017, p. 137), it is indicative that one of the harshest measures against the Ukrainian language was decreed not by the Ministry of Culture, but by the Ministry of Interior. In July 1863, the 'Valuev Circular'—named after Minister of Interior Petr Valuev—declared:

[T]here has never been, is not, and cannot be any separate Little Russian language [...] [T]heir dialect, spoken by the common people, is the selfsame Russian language, only spoiled by the influence of Poland; the all-Russian language is as comprehensible to Little Russians as to Great Russians, in fact much more comprehensible than the one now being devised for them by some Little Russians and, in particular, by the Poles—the so-called Ukrainian language. (Quoted in Plokyh, 2017, p. 138)

The slavophile Ivan Aksakov thought it was pathetic to fear such a weak nationalism as the Ukrainian, but in fact that was exactly what the Minister of the Interior did. The Ukrainophiles—the adherents of a separate Ukrainian identity—were busy constructing a Ukrainian literary language, replete with alphabet, grammar, dictionaries and folklore; as Aleksei Miller has emphasised, Valuev was afraid that 'the Ukrainophiles were winning the race' (Miller, 2003, p. 111). Valuev's policies were prompted by his belief in the weakness, not the strength, of Russian assimilationist policies. The ban which he imposed, reduced the number of Ukrainian language journals from thirty-two to one, however, after he had stepped down as minister, this number increased again to approximately the same number as before the decree was issued (Plokhy, 2017, pp. 138–139). A new intensification of the repressions against the Ukrainian language was made in 1874, when the so-called Edict of Ems was signed by Tsar Alexander II. It renewed all the restrictions in the 1863 circular and added several new ones, including a ban on theatrical performances, songs, and poetry readings in Ukrainian (Plokhy, 2017, pp. 145–146).

The most famous episode in the stand-off between Ukrainophiles and Russian nationalists was the polemics between the Ukrainian historian and leading intellectual Mykola/Nikolai Kostomarov (1817–1885) and the conservative Russian newspaper editor Mikhail Katkov (1818–1887). Kostomarov had been a member of the liberal conspiratorial group The Cyril-Methodius Society in 1847–1848; when this society was broken up by the Tsarist secret police, he was banned for eight years from residing in St. Petersburg. In 1861, he wrote a forty-page letter to the editor of the Ukrainian literary journal *Osnova*, declaring that there were 'two Russian nationalities' (*dve russkie narodnosti*): the 'southern Russians' (*iuzhnorussy*), and the 'Great Russians' (*velikorussy*), who as a result of divergent historical trajectories had developed very different mentalities and collective identities. As was quite common in the nineteenth century throughout Europe, Kostomarov was prepared to generalise liberally about national characteristics, ascribing common personality traits to large groups of people. He held that the two Russian peoples—the 'southern Russians' and the 'Great Russians'—were not only different but in many respects had opposite cultures.

The religious-intellectual tradition of the 'Great Russians' was marked by intolerance towards, indeed contempt for, the religious beliefs of other peoples, Kostomarov argued. 'All foreigners who visited Muscovy in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries unanimously said that the Muscovites despise foreign faiths and nationalities' (Kostomarov, 1861, p. 60). The Tsars led the way, 'washing their hands after being touched by ambassadors of other Christian denominations' (Kostomarov, 1861, p. 60). The religiosity of the 'Great Russians' was marked by an obsession with external forms, a predilection to argue over rituals and attaching dogmatic importance to what was often no more than a grammatical question. Among them, Kostomarov had found little inner piety, but a profusion of bigotry and fanaticism. The religion of the 'South Russians' was very different: 'This people have a lot of precisely what the Great Russians lack: a strong feeling of the omnipresence of God, spiritual tenderness ... and a heartfelt attraction to the spiritual, unknown, unimaginable, and mysterious.'

The religion of the 'Great Russians' reflected their general attitude towards life: They were practical and materialistic people, as shown also in their utilitarian approach to nature. In their gardens they grew vegetables, not flowers—the beauties of nature left them cold: 'It is rare to meet a "Great Russian" who will indulge in contemplation of the firmament, who will stare into a lake illuminated by the sun or the moon, or into the

blue distance of the forest, who will listen to the chorus of birds in the spring' (Kostomarov, 1861, p. 72). By contrast, the dreamers and romantics of southern Russia would do precisely that (Kostomarov, 1861).

The practical, down-to-earth 'Great Russians' had built a strong, centralised state in which individual liberty was sacrificed on the altar of unity and strength. Social relations in the villages and in peasant families were marked by collectivism and hierarchy: personal freedom had to yield to enforced peace and subjugation under a common will imposed from above. The 'southern Russians' simply had no talent for state-building, Kostomarov maintained, their strong urge for personal freedom led to quarrels and enmity within families. 'For a southern Russian, parental guardianship over adult children is felt like unbearable despotism [...] In order to preserve love and harmony between close relatives they need to disperse and have as little as possible in common' (Kostomarov, 1861, p. 73).

As summarised by Faith Hillis, Kostomarov repeatedly stated that 'he saw northern and southern Russians as internally linked' tribes that together formed the unitary 'Rus' nation and expressed his desire to see all the Slavic peoples united under a benevolent Tsar (Hillis, 2013, p. 53). To some degree, Kostomarov apparently tried to distribute positive and negative qualities among the two Russian nationalities, giving a little to each group; however, his sympathies clearly lay with the freedom-loving 'southern Russians'. Given the way he described the gaping differences between the national characteristics of the 'southern Russians' and the 'Great Russians', it remained a mystery how they could all be 'Russians'. Perhaps we may interpret his remark about the southern Russians' desire to have 'as little as possible in common' with close relatives as coded language for how he envisaged the ideal relationship with the Great Russians.

Conservative Russians regarded Kostomarov's article as an affront and a challenge. In June 1863, Mikhail Katkov picked up the cudgel in an editorial in his newspaper *Moskovskie Vedomosti*. To underpin his claim of there being only one Russian nationality, he focused on language, an issue to which Kostomarov had paid scant attention. Katkov argued that the Russian language had far fewer distinct dialects than the language of any other great national group in Europe. In Germany, Italy and even in France—despite the strong centralisation of this state—there were sharp dialectal differences. Indeed, this was true to such an extent that, had it not been for a common state and common literary language, the people there would not have been able to understand each other (Katkov, 1863, p. 92).

The Russian literary language was not based on how the 'Great Russians' spoke, Katkov claimed: 'southern Rus' had participated as much as 'northern Rus', if not more, in its formation. Any effort to promote local dialects and reduce the importance of the existing national, historical language could have no other purpose than an attempted disruption of national unity. Katkov accepted that many dialects of the south-western region of the Russian Empire had some distinct differences from the official national language, on the basis of which it would be possible to compose a separate language 'artificially': 'just as one can construct a separate language even on the basis of the Kostroma or Riazan' dialects' (Katkov, 1863, p. 93).

Katkov averred that he had no intention of casting aspersions on Ukrainophiles. He insisted that most of these people did not understand where their aspirations might lead. 'But it is about time that the Ukrainophiles realise what they are doing, [...] they are being deceived and fooled. [...] there is no doubt that the Ukrainophiles serve as a submissive instrument of the sworn enemies of Ukraine, [the Poles]'. The Ukrainian nationalists

did not understand their own best interests (Katkov, 1863, p. 95). This is an argument which has also been used by many later Russian nationalists.

The Polish rebels in the 1863–1864 uprising had clear demands, Katkov maintained. They had once had their own state and an ‘independent historical existence’ to look back on, as well as a ‘real’ Polish language with its own literature. But Ukraine had never had a separate history or been an independent state: ‘the Ukrainian people are Russians plain and simple. They are indigenous Russian people, an essential part of the Russian people, without which it [the Russian people] cannot remain as it is’ (Katkov, 1863, p. 96). What was at stake for Katkov was not only the identity of Malorossia or the Malorossians, but even more of *Russia* and the Russian people. Without Ukraine, Russia would be amputated, dismembered. This fear also seems to underlie many anti-Ukrainian diatribes of other Russian nationalists. The Ukrainian question is regarded as far more existential than any other nationality question in Russia. As Alexei Miller has emphasised,

[t]he challenge of other nationalisms was perceived by the government and by Russian public opinion as a challenge from ‘outside,’ while the threat of Ukrainian nationalism meant, for the supporters of the All-Russian nation, sabotage from within the ‘national body’. (Miller, 2003, p. 28)

Lev Tikhomirov (1852–1923), a former revolutionary turned reactionary monarchist, warned: ‘if you manage to drive a wedge into the living whole body of the Russian people, if it is possible to split it into two hostile parts, then this will threaten the great Russian state with mortal danger’ (Tikhomirov, 1913, p. 268).

In the nineteenth century, the Tsarist bureaucracy operated with the concept of a ‘triune Russian nation’ (*triedinyi russkii narod*). This ‘trinity’ consisted of three groups—the ‘Great Russians’/*Velikorossy* and the ‘Little Russians’/*Malorossy*, as well as the somewhat smaller group of ‘White Russians’/*Belorusy*. Together, they made-up the ‘Russian nation’. In this way, the three branches of the (all)-Russian nation were kept separate while simultaneously being regarded as one totality. The Tsarist state did not think in categories of ethnicities, but based these categories on dialect differences: the ‘Great Russians’, ‘Little Russians’ and ‘White Russians’ were separate census categories. The idea of a ‘triune nation’ was also widely accepted among the public.

In the 1870s, support for a triune—or rather quadruple—Russian nation came from an unexpected quarter: members of the East Slav Orthodox community in Habsburg Galicia. For some decades in the second half of the nineteenth century, parts of the East Slav Greek-Catholic elites in Austria-Hungary toyed with the idea that they were ‘Russians’. This was a reaction to the 1867 *Ausgleich* agreement, when the Kaiser in Vienna was forced to grant major concessions to the Hungarians, and his East Slav subjects felt betrayed (Rudnytsky, 1989, pp. 43–52). Thus, in 1871, the Habsburg Russophile Adolf Dobriansky declared that:

Our Ruthenian people of 3 million, living under the Austrian scepter, is just one part of one and the same Russian (*russkii*) people, Little, White, and Great Russian and has the same history as they do, the same traditions, the same literature, and the same folk customs; consequently, it has all the characteristics and conditions of complete national unity with the whole Russian people and is therefore in a position (in that

regard) to realise and proclaim its true national status. (Quoted in Plokhyy, 2017, pp. 148–149)

This is a clear example of how identities are formed by interests: deeply disappointed in the Kaiser's lack of support against the Poles and Hungarians, Ruthenians in Galicia elicited support from one autocrat against another. However, this Russophile phase passed; after some vacillation, the East Slavs in the Habsburg domains concluded that they were not 'Russians' or 'Ruthenians' for that matter, but 'Ukrainians'. They belonged to the same group as the 'Malorossians' east of the border, in the Tsarist empire: they were all Ukrainian.

The 'One Nation' Trope in Contemporary Russian Nationalist Discourse

While the *ukrainskii vopros*, or 'the Ukrainian question', has agitated minds in both St. Petersburg and Kyiv for one and a half a century, it is also clear that the massive outpouring of Ukrainophobic books and booklets in recent years has been triggered by events in Kyiv, in particular, the 'Orange revolution' in 2003–2004 and 'Euromaidan revolution'⁸ in 2013–2014. An early example of this literature is *Will Russia Defend Ukraine?* (2006). Here, the high-profile Russian nationalist Egor Kholmogorov (b. 1975) explains that he has written his book 'for Russians in Ukraine who see themselves as Russians, those who do not know any language apart from Russian, and also for those who consider themselves Ukrainians, but cannot imagine the two fraternal peoples divided by alienation and conflict' (Kholmogorov, 2006, p. 12). Kholmogorov himself regards these two peoples as 'two branches of a single people'—the concept of 'branches' (*vetvi*) is a direct echo of the Tsarist-era concept of 'the triune people'.

Today, Kholmogorov goes on to explain, conflict between Russians and Ukrainians is being actively provoked. In his view, most of the blame for this provocation lies with the people behind the 'Orange Revolution' and their western 'curators'. For more than a century, the enemies of Russia have tried to turn the east of Europe into a barrier against the historical self-realisation of Russia. Instead of being part of a 'Great Russia', a free state that has chosen its own path, Ukraine is being turned into building material for a wall that will cordon off a 'reduced' (*umenshennaia*) Russia. The ultimate goal of this policy is to destroy the Russians as Russians. That is why Ukraine, where the majority of the citizens identify either as Russian or as both Russian and Ukrainian, has become a battlefield.⁹ For Kholmogorov, then, a Russia within the confines of the Russian Federation as it exists today is a 'reduced' Russia, a 'geopolitical sarcophagus' (Kholmogorov, 2006, p. 12). 'Great Russia'—the 'natural' Russia—stretches much further; this forms part of an undisguised expansionist agenda.

Kholmogorov followed the 2014 events in Donbas closely and visited the region during the fighting. He claims (probably correctly) that he coined the appellation which is usually used in Russia to refer to the uprising: 'the Russian Spring'. In 2015 he published a 'chronicle' of the events with the title 'to punish the punishers'.¹⁰ He explains that the Kyiv junta and their followers must be dealt with without mercy since they have started a war with no holds barred. They had taken advantage of Russia's failure (as he claimed) to support the Donbas rebels, and with unconditional support from the West they have 'switched to more and more cruel methods of war: terrorist shelling and bombing of residential areas, killing children, women, and old people, filtration camps, torture and rape' (Kholmogorov, 2015,

p. 8). Russia has every right to intervene in the conflict since this would simply be an act of self-defence:

They are not killing 'our neighbors', not 'our brothers'. They are killing us. We are one people [...] Who are the Russians in Ukraine? They are Russians, and Ukrainians who speak one language, Russian, and comprise one people. (Kholmogorov, 2015, pp. 88 and 117)

Similar ideas are presented in the book *The Torch of Novorossia*, by Pavel Gubarev (b. 1983), one of the leaders of the Donbas Rebellion in spring 2014 (Matveeva, 2018, p. 82). On 1 March 2014, Gubarev was proclaimed 'People's governor of Donbass'; he was one of the main initiators of the 'Novorossia' project, an attempt to unite the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics into one confederated state in June of the same year. That initiative soon fizzled out, and Gubarev was shunted to the sidelines of Donbas politics. *The Torch of Novorossii* can be seen as his political testament, where he explains the motivation behind his engagement in the rebellion:

We support the creation of an empire; we are imperialists. We despise [...] small national states. Russia has always been and will be an empire by dint of its size and diversity. Russians have always lived peacefully next to the indigenous peoples throughout this vast oikumene and will continue to do so. The 'Great Russians' live next to the Turks, the Fenno-Ugrians, the Mountain peoples and the peoples of Siberia and the North. Here in Novorossia live Greeks, Tatars, Gagauzians, Bulgarians and Moldovans-Bessarabians. Here we do not mention the Ukrainians and Belorussians since, according to our understanding, they are members of the triune Russian people. (Gubarev, 2016, p. 286)

Anatolii Vasserman (b. 1952) is a journalist from Odesa who later moved to Russia and represented the party 'A Just Russia' in the State Duma. He wrote *Russia, including Ukraine* (2010) while he was still living in Ukraine. In the preface, he acknowledges that he had previously accepted the existence of three independent peoples and languages—Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian—as an established fact. 'But now I have gathered enough arguments and material to conclude that they are inalienable parts of the Russian people—to be sure, with their obvious specifics—just as people from Arkhangelsk or Kursk or Perm are' (*Korrespondent*, 2009, p. 4).

Vasserman regards Belarusian and Ukrainian as dialects of Russian and prefers the designation 'Malorossia' to 'Ukraine'. He points out that the word 'little' in this context does not imply any denigration of this territory, as Ukrainian sources often claim (Vasserman, 2010, p. 233). Indeed, in the nineteenth century many Ukrainian historians and other intellectuals with nationalist leanings used the term Malorossy about themselves and did not find this designation problematic, he points out. Vasserman also reminds his readers that the toponym 'Ukraine' means 'outskirts' or periphery, So, if any name is a 'colonial nickname' it is Ukraine, not Malorossia (*Korrespondent*, 2009).

In 2009, Maksim Kalashnikov (b. 1966) (pseudonym for Vladimir Kurchenko) and another colleague wrote a book together, entitled *Independent Ukraine: A Failed Project*. Kalashnikov, who grew up in Odesa, is a right-wing Russian journalist and one of the founding members of the *Izborskii klub*, a cross between a think-tank and a

nationalist lobby group (Laruelle, 2016). Kalashnikov's brand of Russian nationalism is state-focused (*derzhavnicheskii*): he distances himself sharply from those nationalists who focus on Russian ethnicity in a narrow sense, as for instance Kholmogorov does. This lengthy excerpt from his text sheds light on a Russian state-focused nationalist's line of argument:

It's time to understand: we are not just 'fraternal Slavic peoples', we are one great Russian People. And our 'movy'¹¹ are simply dialects of one Russian language, we can understand each other without translators [...] For we are all Russians, coming from the same Kiev-Novgorod Ancient Rus. Damn it! [We are] one glorious and great tribe which has managed to spread from Brest to the sands of Primor'e, from Kiev to Chukotka, from Odessa and Tiraspol to Sakhalin, Amur and the coast of the Arctic Ocean. Together we are a giant people (*narod-ispolin*), able to bring Europe to its knees in a terrible war; we were the first to venture into space and established a world power. One nation in all its blooming diversity [...]

Our strength lies in our plasticity, diversity is our strength [...] We are equally disgusted with the Bandera bastards who declare that the 'Muscovites' are a mixture of Tatars and Fenno-Ugrians and with the so-called 'Russian nationalists,' who declare that the Khokhly¹² are Polish-Turkish mestizos. Into the dust bin with all of them! [...] The difference between a Little Russian from Sumy [in Ukraine] and a Muscovite-Great Russian is much less than between a Bavarian and a Prussian, between a resident of Beijing and one from Guǎngzhōu. We have one faith, one alphabet, the same folktales and the same legends. (Kalashnikov & Buntovskii, 2009, pp. 320–321)

In the *Izbornskii klub*, Kalashnikov collaborates with Alexander Dugin (b. 1962), one of the most infamous Russian right-wing thinkers. Dugin advocates a kind of restoration of the Soviet Union under a new ideology: neo-Eurasianism (Laruelle, 2008). He holds many of the same imperialist ideas as Kalashnikov but the arguments they employ differ in many respects. Whereas Kalashnikov, as noted, claims that all East Slavs are 'one people,' Dugin maintains that a sharp civilisational divide runs right through the Ukrainian nation, dividing the East from the West (Dugin, 2009; 2015). Dugin does not explicitly refer to Samuel Huntington's metaphor of tectonic 'fault lines', but he certainly could have done so. For both, when civilisations are formed, religion is more important than language.

In 2009, Dugin claimed that Ukraine consists of two nations with opposing geopolitical orientations. On the one hand, there are the people of eastern Ukraine: this population consists partly of 'Great Russians' and partly of 'Little Russians', but they are all Russians, they are all children of the Russian Orthodox Church. Like the 'Great Russians', the 'Little Russians', according to Dugin, are oriented towards unity with Russia (Dugin, 2009).

Then there are the western Ukrainians, who have a completely different cultural orientation.

The West-Russian lands begin on the right bank of the Dnieper, and they have had a very different historical fate. Partly they were in Poland, partly under Austria, partly with us, sometimes they changed their subordination. As for left-bank Ukraine, this

territory has nothing to do with the western Russian lands, these are Cossack lands. And there is no difference between them and the Don, the same people live there, speaking the same language. They have nothing in common with western Russian culture. (Dugin, 2015, p. 14)

The western Ukrainians—are reckoned as part of the European cultural space. However, they are not fully Europeans, maintains Dugin, who calls them 'sub-Europeans'. The main thing is that they, in contrast to the 'Little Russians', are not Russians. They have their own ethnic identity and speak a specific dialect, which is quite different from the official Ukrainian language, which in any case he sees as an artificial construction (Dugin, 2009).

According to Dugin, not only has Ukraine as a national state never existed, but there is no Ukrainian ethnos either, no Ukrainian nation, and no Ukrainian civilisation (Dugin, 2015, pp. 14–15). He holds that Russia ought to annex left-bank Ukraine, but leave right-bank Ukraine to its own devices, at least for the time being. 'We can't take the whole of the Ukraine now, if we try to do that, then we will lose everything. Sooner or later also western Ukraine must be included in Russia, but we need time to prepare' (Dugin, 2015, p. 20). Dugin's Russia is just as expansionist as Kholmogorov's. However, why it should be necessary to occupy western Ukraine if the people living there are not 'Russians' remains unexplained.

The Russian historian Mikhail Smolin (b. 1971) is an Orthodox monarchist and imperialist (Kolstø, 2019, p. 37). In 2014, he published a collection of older texts on Ukrainian history which he titled *Ukraine is Russia*. The title was probably a reference to, and a rebuttal of, a book written eleven years earlier by Ukrainian President Viktor Kuchma: *Ukraine is not Russia* (Kuchma, 2003/2014).

People in Ukraine who are fighting against Russian statehood have been misled into believing that they are Ukrainian, Smolin claims. They undermine the unity of the Russian people and 'must be removed from the Russian body as a harmful virus' (Smolin, 2014, p. 28). Further, an ideological fog hinders many Russians from seeing the great harm of the Ukrainian 'movement'. It is necessary to help people who are drawn into this 'movement' to understand that they are victims of Great Power politics, used as weapons in the battle against the unity of the Russian nation.

Nationally minded Russians must therefore, in order to protect the future of the Russian people, under no circumstances recognise the right to existence of the state of Ukraine. We need to help people in Ukraine to overcome Ukrainianism quickly and acquire a new immunity against all possible localisms and farm-based identities [*mestechkovye, khutorskie samobytnosti*], elevating their narrowly ethnographic attitudes into universal principles. (Smolin, 2014, p. 28)

Smolin regards Ukrainians as a brainwashed people who must be liberated through some kind of psychotherapy. No one is born a Ukrainian, he claims: a person 'becomes Ukrainian as a result of a long processing' (*obrabotka*) (Smolin, 2014).

The final contemporary Russian publicist I would like to introduce is Nikolai Starikov (b. 1970). Like Kalashnikov and Dugin, Starikov is a *gosudarstvennik*, indeed, a neo-Stalinist. He views the conflict in Ukraine primarily through a geopolitical lense and regards 'Euromaidan' in light of the Anglo-Saxons' alleged centuries-old ambitions to

hold back Russian marine power (Starikov, 2014, p. 73). So, whereas Kholmogorov sees the annexation of Crimea as necessary primarily in order to protect the rights of the ethnic Russians living there, for Starikov the most important objective is to retain the Sevastopol military base. He also regards 'Euromaidan' as an instrument in a larger US scheme to introduce chaos, first in Ukraine and then in Russia, hence the title of his book 'Ukraine: chaos and revolution as an instrument of the dollar'.

The role of Ukraine in this geopolitical struggle is to serve as kindling to ignite a fire. Therefore, it makes no sense for Russia to try and deal directly with the leaders in Kyiv: they are mere puppets, with their puppet masters sitting in Washington DC (Starikov, 2014, p. 77).

According to Starikov, the confrontation between the West and Russia is not ideological. Ideologies belong to the past: what is now at stake is the survival of *civilisations*:

The Ukrainian people are a part of the Russian people and therefore part of the Russian civilisation. The vast majority of Ukrainians perceive it this way, genetically. Their pull towards Russia is a pull towards themselves. Western civilisation, by contrast, with all its gloss and brilliance, is alien to them, as it is for all other Russians, including Chechens, Tatars, and so on. (Starikov, 2014, p. 73)

For two decades the Malorussians have been told that they are Ukrainian and have been forced to speak, write, and think only in Ukrainian. This, Starikov writes, would have been acceptable if it had been voluntary. But,

You cannot violate the genetic code of tens of millions of people without consequences. Within the framework of Russian civilisation, no one perceives Ukrainian or any other native language as something alien. It is organic and natural, our civilisation is multifaceted and multinational. (Starikov, 2014, p. 84)

Starikov wrote those words in mid-March 2014, at a time when many in Russia, including Dugin and Kalashnikov, were pushing for the Russian state to intervene militarily in Donbas (Kolstø, 2016). Starikov, however, warned:

This is what the [Kyiv] junta is waiting for, in order to be able to present the Russians as the aggressors and to provoke the Russian and Ukrainian peoples to fight among themselves. [...] If our troops enter [Donbas], the guys there will think they are defending their homeland against a blood-thirsty Russian regime, and they will fight tooth and nail [*ne na zhizn' a na smert'*: not for life but for death]. We don't need that. (Starikov, 2014, pp. 133–134)

Starikov's analysis, made eight years before the renewed Russian onslaught on Ukraine in February 2022, was in many respects quite prescient. The Ukrainians are indeed fighting 'not for life but for death' against the Russians to defend their country against foreign aggression. However, I have not found any sources where Starikov comments on this warning or congratulates himself on having made an accurate prediction.

Since 2011–2012, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has become one of the most important providers of legitimacy and ideological orientation for the Putin regime (Burgess, 2017, chapter 1; Jarzyńska, 2014; Köllner, 2021; Richters, 2013). The head of

the ROC, Patriarch Kirill (Gundiaev), may be regarded as one of the pioneers of the ‘One People’ ideology in post-Soviet Russia. Already in 1992, a long time before he was elected Patriarch, he claimed that:

The historical community of peoples inhabiting our homeland [is] a thousand years old, at least for the Slavs baptised in the single baptismal font of Kiev. [...] We have indeed become largely one people. [...] That is why the politics of radical sovereignty cannot be implemented in our circumstances without an enormous risk of causing moral damage to society and provoking the gravest social consequences. Under these conditions, the most humane, noble and viable [option] would be the states’ voluntary self-restraint in exercising their sovereignty. (Kirill in Lukichev, 2016, pp. 80–81)

Most of the time when patriarch Kirill is talking about one ‘people’, he is referring to the Ukrainians and Russians (and Belarusians) as a religious category, as ‘the people of God’. He has desperately tried to hold on to Ukraine as the exclusive canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate, a struggle which eventually failed when the Orthodox Church of Ukraine was recognised as autocephalous by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople in 2019. Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, he has used his authority to bolster President Putin’s claims about not only a shared spiritual, but also a shared ethnic and national identity of the Ukrainian-Russian people.

Patriarch Kirill has repeated this message numerous times. On 18 March 2022, three weeks after the Russian attack on Ukraine, he said in a sermon that the Russian Church is ‘called upon to preserve the spiritual unity of our people’ and explicitly pointed out that by ‘our people’ he meant ‘the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, a single people that emerged from the Kiev Baptismal Font’. Their unity, he claimed, in the current situation of hostilities is ‘exposed to certain dangers’ (Kirill, 2022a). This must be regarded as an understatement.

The Patriarch reiterated the same message in a sermon two days later, taking God as his witness that he was speaking the truth:

We are truly one people who come from the Kiev Baptismal font! I know that in Ukraine the opponents of this will shout: ‘Again, the Patriarch is saying that we are one people’, but the Patriarch cannot say otherwise, because this is the historical truth and God’s truth. And the fact that we live today in different countries does not change this historical truth and cannot change it. (Kirill, 2022b)

Ukrainian historian Georgii Kas’ianov has argued that:

In the political, geopolitical and cultural thinking of the Russian ruling class there is a certain ‘ontological anxiety’ precisely in connection with Ukraine. It is difficult for Russian elites to perceive Ukraine and Ukrainians as fundamentally different from themselves, as an Other. [...] Ukraine’s self-determination as a state is regarded as a cruel joke of history and a misunderstanding. (Kas’ianov, 2019, p. 543)

Let us return to Vladimir Putin. His July 2021 article was not the first instance where he made claims about the unity of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples (or as he would have

put it: ‘people’—singular). Putin had already expressed this opinion eight years earlier, in a 2013 interview with Associated Press and the Russian TV station *Pervyi Kanal*. The fact that this claim was made in an interview with western journalists, indicated that this claim was not intended solely for internal consumption: it was a message which Putin wants to convey to people outside Russia as well.

On another occasion, also in 2013, Putin made a very similar claim at a conference in Kyiv on ‘Orthodox-Slavic Values and the Foundation of Ukraine’s Civilisational Choice’:

Our ancestors who lived in these lands made this choice for our entire people. When I say: ‘for our entire people’, we are of course aware of today’s realities: we know that there are the Ukrainian people and the Belarusian people, and other peoples too, and we respect all parts of this heritage. All the same, at the foundation of this heritage are the common spiritual values that make us a single people. (Putin, 2013a)

Indirectly, Putin was saying was that it may seemingly be some tensions between two diverging notions, one about the complete unity of the East-Slavic peoples and another, expressing the Soviet idea of the existence of separate Ukrainian and Belarusian nations. However, in his view the Soviet legacy does not cancel out the pre-revolutionary concept of their fundamental unity.

The claim that the Ukrainians are members of the same people as the Russians appears also in Putin’s landmark speech on 18 March 2014, when he celebrated the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. This speech shows the sinister potential of this line of argument and how it can be used to justify Russian aggression towards its neighbours. It also reveals some of the muddled thinking behind Putin’s narrative of ‘one people’: to the two incompatible assertions—that the Ukrainians and Russians are one people *and* that they are brotherly peoples—he now added a third: that the Russians are ‘one of the largest, if not the largest, divided nation in the world’ (Putin, 2014). Clearly, by ‘the Russians’ Putin could here not mean ‘the population of Russia’, because ‘Russians’ seen in civic terms as ‘citizens of Russia’ are by definition not divided by borders: they all live in the same state. Hence, he must have been referring to an ethnic concept. However, nor could ‘the Russians’ mean ‘the ethnic Russians plus ethnic Ukrainians’, because the annexation of Crimea would not make ‘the Russians-plus-Ukrainians’-group any less politically divided than they were previously; after 2014, the vast majority of Ukrainians have continued to live outside the borders of Russia.

When Putin again returned to this idea, in an interview with TASS in 2020, he acknowledged that people in Ukraine may not see things the same way as he does, but their views should not be taken into account:

[*Putin*]: I have already said many times: I believe that we are one and the same people.

[*TASS journalist*]: The Ukrainians really don’t like this.

[*Putin*]: I don’t know whether they like it or not, but if you look at the realities, this is the truth. (Putin, 2020)

This is a telling admission: it does not matter what the people themselves believe or feel: President Putin views national or ethnic identity as objective and unchangeable. This had been the predominant understanding of identity in nineteenth-century Europe; although it

has now been discarded in western academic literature, it lived on in Soviet scholarship right up to the dissolution of the USSR, and lingers on among many politically influential groups in Russia today (Brubaker, 1996, chapter 1).

In his annual call-in conference with Russian citizens in June 2021, President Putin was asked why Ukraine was not listed among Russia's 'most unfriendly nations'. This, he explained, was because 'I believe Ukrainians and Russians are, in general, one people' (Putin, 2021a). To underpin this claim, he pointed to several parallels around the world: the Jews in Israel who hail from many different continents, have different skin colour and speak diverse languages, and the Mordvins in the Russian Federation, who consist of three distinct subgroups, speaking mutually unintelligible languages. He then asked why the Mordvins nevertheless recognise each other as members of the same ethnic group and answered himself: it is because they understand that division weakens them. Applying this reasoning to the Russian case, he claimed that external forces have always tried to pull the Russian people apart and fragment it: 'This has been going on since the Middle Ages, with the Polish Commonwealth, which wanted to become a great power and to achieve that tried to divide up everyone around'. Later, he claimed, this policy of divide-and-rule was adopted by Austria-Hungary. Putin ended by saying that he had no time to elaborate on this issue during the call-in conference and instead had decided to write a special analytical article on the topic which he hoped people in Russia and Ukraine would read (Putin, 2021a). This was the first announcement of the programmatic article published two weeks later (Putin, 2021b).

Putin has also revisited the 'one people' issue after 24 February 2022, in a defensive and defiant tone. On 3 March, that is, only one week after the launch of the attack on Ukraine, he met with the Russian Security Council and praised the courage of an ethnic Lak soldier from Dagestan who had died on the battlefield in Ukraine and been posthumously awarded the Hero of Russia medal. The reason why this particular soldier was singled out for praise was clearly to underline that the war effort was supported by all national groups in Russia, and with a nod to John F Kennedy's famous Berlin speech in 1963, Putin declared that, today, he himself was 'a Lak, a Dagestani, a Chechen, an Ingush, a Russian, a Tatar, a Jew, a Mordvin and an Ossetian'. He continued by emphasising the ethnic bond between Russians and Ukrainians as an important justification for invasion: the Russians were defending their own people.

I will never give up my conviction that Russians and Ukrainians are one people, even though some of the inhabitants of Ukraine have been intimidated, and many have been fooled by Nazi nationalist propaganda while others, of course, deliberately follow the path of Bandera and other Nazi henchmen who fought on the side of Hitler during the Great Patriotic War. (Putin, 2022a)

Putin returned to this topic once again at the Valdai meeting in October the same year, when he was interviewed by Fedor Luk'ianov, editor of the journal *Russia in Global Affairs*, who asked whether the President had changed his view on the 'one people'-issue 'over the last year' (Putin, 2022c). If one were to read between the lines of Luk'ianov's question, an acknowledgement could be detected: the strong Ukrainian resistance against the Russian attack seemed to have made the claim of a national unity between Russians and Ukrainians less convincing. Putin replied that his position remained unchanged, since this unity was 'an historical fact'. Then he proceeded to give listeners

a short version of the same historical overview of Ukrainian-Russian relations as he had presented in his July 2021 article (Putin, 2022c).

Conclusions

If the Tsarist regime had been determined to eradicate Ukrainians as a distinct group and make them assimilate to the (Great) Russian nation, it would not have operated with Malorussians as a separate census category, as was the case in the 1897 census. While the Tsarist bureaucracy did not think in terms of ethnicity, it clearly treated Ukrainians as a group of people with a separate cultural identity, albeit one closely related to the other East Slav Orthodox groups in the Russian empire.

In his programmatic article *On the Historical Unity of the Russians and Ukrainians* Vladimir Putin referred to the concept of a triune Russian nation only once and only in a historical context, pointing out that this was a formula used by the Tsarist authorities. In his other talks and statements, it appears only at a joint press conference with the Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka on 12 April 2022, six weeks into the war. One might perhaps have expected that on this occasion Putin would have used the same phrase as he uses when he discusses Ukrainian-Russian relations and claimed that the Belarusians and Russians are ‘one people’. Instead, when asked by a Belarusian journalist whether he regarded the Belarusian people as a ‘younger brother’, he replied:

I would put the stress on the second word: not ‘younger’, but ‘brother’. We have always treated Belarus this way and nothing has changed in that regard in recent months [...]. We do not distinguish where Belarus ends and Russia begins, where is Russia and where is Belarus. Also, strange as it may sound today, I have always said that we are a triune people: Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. (Putin, 2022b)

Some Belarusian commentators found this blurring of geographical and identitarian borders between the two nations disconcerting, as a possible preparation for the takeover of Belarus (Zakharova, 2022b). Be that as it may, the concept of a ‘triune nation’ is in my view slightly less controversial than the concept of ‘Ukrainians and Russians as one nation’. The contemporary claim that Russians and Ukrainians are one people is different from the pre-revolutionary idea of the triune nation for the simple reason that the term ‘Russians’ (*russkie*) does not refer to the same group of people in the two contexts. The pre-revolutionary official discourse operated on two conceptual levels: ‘Russians’ and ‘Great Russians’. Today’s ‘Russians’ are yesterday’s ‘Great Russians,’ who were merely a subgroup of ‘the Russians’, just like the Malorossians and the Belarussians were. When it is said today that Ukrainians are ‘Russians’, this claim delegitimises the Ukrainian nation and subsumes it under the Russian nation far more dramatically than the theory of the triune identity. A clear expression of this can be found in one of the books of Egor Kholmogorov quoted above: ‘Who are Russians in Ukraine? They are Russians and Ukrainians who speak one language, Russian’ (Kholmogorov, 2015, p. 117). In this quote, the ‘Russians’ are clearly whom they think they are—Russians—but the Ukrainians are not. They are not themselves, but somebody else.

At a press conference in July 2021, ten days before Putin’s programmatic article was published, his press secretary Dmitriy Peskov was asked by a Ukrainian journalist why the Russian President called the Belarusians ‘a brotherly people’ but claimed that

Ukrainians and Russians are ‘one people’. Peskov somewhat disingenuously declared that these two expressions are ‘synonymous’ (Interfax, 2021). This poses the question of why Putin never uses the notion of a ‘triune people’ with reference to the Ukrainians or the ‘one people’ rhetoric about the Belarusians. Peskov argues that two persons can at the same time be one person, a claim that taxes our credulity.

On 13 March 2022, Metropolitan Ilarion, at the time head the Department for External Church Relations in the Moscow Patriarchate and the second most influential prelate in the Russian Orthodox Church, in a television interview was confronted with the following question:

Today, many people believe that Ukrainians and Russians are one ‘brotherly’ people. But we speak different languages, and have different historical features, mentalities, and traditions. Don’t you think that the declaration about one people is harmful for the relations between our countries? (*Pravoslavie.ru*, 2022)

The Metropolitan’s answer was unremarkable: he simply repeated Patriarch Kirill’s somewhat hackneyed phrase about the ‘common baptismal font’ in Kyiv. However, the question seems to reveal a certain uneasiness about the ‘one people’ ideology amongst the Russian population. Neither the Metropolitan nor those who viewed the programme in question could be in doubt that foremost among those ‘many people’ who believe in this ideologeme is the Russian President.

Notes

1. An Internet search in 2022 gave roughly 40 hits on titles on sale.
2. Anatolii Vasserman (2013).
3. Mikhail Smolin (2014).
4. Andrei Manchuk (2017).
5. Other parallels to this terminology can be found also in Greece and in other countries further afield (Losskii, 1958, p. 446; Karevin, 2020, pp. 7–10).
6. On the concept of the ‘Constituting Other’ see Neumann (1999).
7. The book has been attributed to Innokenty Gizel, the Abbot of the Cave monastery in Kyiv (Zygar, 2023, pp. 7–9).
8. Also known as the Revolution of Dignity.
9. As Kholmogorov was writing in 2006, eight years before the outbreak of actual military hostilities, his concept of the ‘battlefield’ was either prophetic or (more likely) metaphorical.
10. The Russian word *karatel’* carries connotations of cruelty and mercilessness.
11. Ukrainian for ‘languages’.
12. Derogatory term used to refer to Ukrainians.

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Notes on Contributor

Pål Kolstø, Dr. Philos., is professor of Russian and post-Soviet Studies at the University of Oslo. He specializes in ethnic relations, nationalism and religion in Russia and other former Soviet republics. He is the author/editor of ten English-language books on these topics, including *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism, 2000–2015* (2016), and *Russia Before and After Crimea Nationalism and Identity, 2010–17* (2018), both published by Edinburgh University Press and co-edited with Helge Blakkisrud. His latest monographs are *Strategic Uses of Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: Interest and Identity in Russia and the Post-Soviet Space*, Edinburgh University Press (2022), and *Heretical Orthodoxy: Lev Tolstoi and the Russian Orthodox Church*, Cambridge University Press (2022).

ORCID

Pål Kolstø  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2745-4198>

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