

Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change
Series IVA, Eastern and Central Europe, Volume 42
General Editor
George F. McLean

The Idea of Solidarity: Philosophical and Social Contexts

Polish Philosophical Studies, X

Edited by
Dariusz Dobrzański

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Box 261
Cardinal Station
Washington, DC 20064

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Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication

The idea of solidarity – philosophical and social contexts / edited by Dariusz
Dobrzański.

p. cm. -- (Cultural heritage and contemporary change. Series IV,
Eastern and Central Europe ; v. 42) (Polish philosophical studies ; 10)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

I. Solidarity. I. Dobrzański, Dariusz.

HM717.L335 2011

302'.14--dc23

2011021343

CIP

ISBN 978-1-56518-269-1 (pbk.)

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Dia-Logos

Schriften zu Philosophie und Sozialwissenschaften
Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences

Herausgegeben von / Edited by
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PETER LANG
EDITION

Tadeusz Buksiński (ed.)

Identities and Modernizations

**Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche
Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the
Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is
available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

This publication was financially supported
by the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Identities and modernizations / Tadeusz Buksinski (ed.).
pages cm

ISBN 978-3-631-64497-3

1. Nationalism. 2. National characteristics. 3. Civilization,
Modern. I. Buksinski, Tadeusz.

JC311.I284 2013

320.5401—dc23

2013028882

ISSN 1619-005X

ISBN 978-3-631-64497-3 (Print)

ISBN 978-3-653-03373-1 (E-Book)

DOI 10.3726/978-3-653-03373-1

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Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften

Frankfurt am Main 2013

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Peter Lang – Frankfurt am Main · Berlin · Bruxelles · New York ·
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Ukrainian Intellectuals: A New Class or Clients of Power?

Abstract: This paper considers normative dimensions of the community of Ukrainian intellectuals and the problems related to the modernization process in Ukrainian society. The author emphasizes the social and cultural determinants of the process of formation and development of local intellectual identity, its conceptualization in the Soviet and Post-Soviet world. The analysis is centered on the clash of Central European and Russian discourses in the context of shaping the identity of Ukrainian intellectuals. The paper raises some general problems regarding these discourses as well as the development of values within the local intellectual community in the context of its belonging to certain socio-cultural traditions, its compatibility with the dimensions of morality, social responsibility and openness to changes. Synthesizing the different approaches to the historical experience of formation and evolution of the intellectual community, it also explores the role and significance of this group in the process of social reconstruction.

Keywords: new class, Ukrainian intellectuals, colonial discourse, cliental subjugation, Central European discourse, the identity of Central Europe, modernization and rationalization, universal society, moral ethos, moral values, paternalistic structure, economic determinism, innovative class and innovative society, individual and collective identity

1. Introduction

The paper deals with the dilemma of the search of the normative foundations by the Ukrainian intellectual community as a condition for authentic communication inside of a civil society and shaping a national prototype of the Western middle class as a source of transformation of the Post-Soviet reality towards a democratic social order. The paper focuses on the role and social functions of intellectuals in the process of the reformation of Soviet and Post-Soviet society, as well as in the place of the intellectual community in the rudimental social structure. The problem is whether the intellectuals are the driving force of social changes in Ukraine a social group based on values, norms and foundations, an indispensable part of the rational process of modernity, or a destructive group stemming from the Russian and Soviet historical experience and separated from the civilized social practice of society. Are intellectuals more oriented towards

collaboration with the dominating colonial discourse and cliental subjugation to authorities or towards the representation of human dignity, social trust and solidarity in society, as well as the positive values of social innovations and cooperation with other innovative groups?

The Ukrainian intellectual community is treated as a part of the Post-Communist order, a particular Post-Soviet “unreformed” group facing the serious threat of an identity crisis and loss of legitimacy because of the embodiment in the context of domination of an old industrial model of economic development. This model displays the constant weakening of social activity, shrinking public space, loss of authentic communication, post-colonial state intervention destroying an intellectual and collective memory, and a weakened sense of belonging to social groups.

As Milan Kundera pointed out

... when Russians occupied Czechoslovakia, they did everything possible to destroy Czech culture. This same was in Ukraine. This destruction had three meanings: first, it destroyed the centre of the opposition; second, it undermined the identity of the nation, enabling it to be more easily swallowed up by Russian civilization; third, it put a violent end to the modern era, the era in which culture still represented the realization of supreme values.¹

In other words, colonial cultural domination led to the annihilation of local value standards and the dehumanization of cultural and intellectual patterns in colonized countries. A similar view was expressed by Ivan Dzyuba:

Soviet cultural politics for Ukrainians was a politics of russification and destruction of national cultural foundations of existing social communities as well as the repressions against intellectual elite that led to degradation of national identity and moral corrosion in society.²

In this context it is very important to estimate the role of the intellectual community in Ukraine and in Central Europe.

Unlike Europe, where the idea of “cultural foundations” was imperative in the social consciousness of educated groups for a long historical time, in the Russian Empire, and especially in the Soviet Union, the role of the intellectual

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- 1 Milan Kundera, “The Tragedy of Central Europe”, in: *Globalization and Politics of Public memory*, New York: Transgression Centre for Democratic Studies, 2007, p. 69.
 - 2 Ivan Dzyuba, “Internatsionalizm chy rusyfikatsiya” [Internationalism or Russification], *Vitchyzna* (Kiev), 1990, no. 5, pp. 107–108.

community was permanently decreasing in the context of the degradation of spiritual foundations for identity, reduction of morality, and historical and national memory. Moral corrosion made people passive members of their social groups and was a serious obstacle to modernization in all spheres of social life. This entailed the marginalization of intellectual groups, dismantling of social ties and the degradation of social capital. Such a situation was caused by the Marxist revolution that took place in a country where religious foundations, class and communal structures were weak and social identity was in crisis. In those conditions the idea of modernization, due to the total transformation of all spheres of social life based on spiritual and moral imperatives, has not been a meaningful aspect of intellectual life during the Soviet period.

This may be explained by the historical context of our country, the destruction of secular and sacral patterns of culture and the decreasing role of the intellectual community in Soviet social structure, where the prevailing totalitarian practice of social violence over the intelligentsia, destruction of values of civil society, and the prosecution of intellectuals and clerical groups by the totalitarian regime.

2. Ukrainian intellectuals in the context of Central European discourse

The identity construction of Central European intellectuals contrasts to that in Post-Soviet Ukraine and is a good example of personal shifting towards the transformation of values and social institutions. The core of this identity is characterized by its evolution from the substantial to constructivist, synthesis of sacral and secular narratives in an intellectual's life, shaping the framework of civil society on the basis of relevant values, and the public participation of dissidents in Central European revolutions and market reforms of the 1990's.

The renovation of the individual and collective identity of Central European intellectuals becomes possible through the recognition of rational discourse and relevant values as the dominant component of a democratic social system. The fact that intellectuals overcame colonial discourse led to the reconstitution of the socio-cultural problems of civil society via the reconsideration of cultural foundations, and dimensions of pre-modern and modern social life. Despite the lack of personal autonomies in the Communist period, despite all institutional crises, intellectual life in Central Europe was part of a resistance against colonial discourse, a factor of civil society evolution and a source of the idea of national independence as a synthesis of ethnographic, academic and political dimensions.

The intellectual community in Central Europe produces cultural conditions for the national consolidation of power and civil society. An anti-colonial style of social behaviour is actualized in the context of historical experience through the project of anti-colonial teaching, writing, research and the public criticism of Marxism as a promoter of colonial discourse.

Obviously, this active role of intellectuals in the social structure of Western and Central European society was related to certain features of a pluralist institutional and symbolic structure, e.g. development of intellectual groups in European cities as independent actors of civil society, oriented to reforms and social innovations. Identity dynamics at the end of the 20th century tended towards increasing the similarities of the values of this social group, democratic practice of horizontal communication in cities, and increasing the role of knowledge and intellectual social prestige.

Historically, the situation in Ukraine and Russia differed from Western and Central European patterns. This historical heritage threatens the democratic foundations of statehood and the formation of authentic horizontal communication.

In the early part of the 20th century, Ukrainian theorist Vyacheslav Lipinski, commenting on the famous essay of Nikolai Berdyaev "Philosophic Verity and Intelligentsia Truth," 1918, wrote about the "intelligentsia" as an Eastern European version of intellectuals and about the role of intellectuals in nation-building and shaping the moral pivot of the Ukrainian nation. Lipinski pointed out that "society saw the natural role of the intelligentsia as exercising moral authority and mediating between different social communities."³ He focused on the shift from material to spirit orientations as the basic values of the intelligentsia that could be regarded, in both Western and Eastern Ukraine, as a prototype of the European middle class. According to him, the reformation of the value sphere of the intellectual community stimulates the processes of individual and collective responsibility, expansion of human dignity, creation and the mobilization of civil society institution.

In contrast to Western Europe where the middle class has been the main supporter of democratic, horizontal ties of self-government and formation of identity, Ukrainian intellectuals in the Soviet period were just a corporative social group within the network of total obedience. The majority of intellectual

3 Vyacheslav Lypyns'kyi, *Lysty do bratv-khliborobiv. Pro ideyu i orhanizatsiyu ukraïns'koho monarkhizmu* [Letters to brothers Peasants. One idea and organization of Ukrainian Monarchism], Kyiv-Filadel'fiya 1995, p. 22.

dissidents were destroyed by the colonial system. During the total repressions of the 20th century, the moral foundations of Ukrainian society inherited from national traditions were dismantled by the colonial system of total alienation. The totalitarian power formed a system of mistrust inside the communities and the model of distorted social dimensions. This resulted in the essential alienation of intellectuals from the problems of culture, morals, education and spirituality. Most of the intellectuals were just unable to hold independent public opinions that were different from the official position of the authorities.

The incompatibility of the Ukrainian reality with the Central European one is caused by a number of factors. Our intellectual community is weakly enrooted in the symbolic life-world, the level of its ethical foundations is constantly decreasing, it lacks connections with pre-modern and modern values of collective and individual responsibility; its moral self-consciousness, moral and spiritual autonomy were gradually reduced. The intellectuals in Western and Central Europe represent not just a group of interests among many others, but an alternative moral universe of values and norms, an image of the public good with claims to overall legitimacy. Ukrainian intellectuals were unable to display all that for a long time. Moral values for Central European intellectuals historically were not a private matter but were conceived of as a collective guarantee of a common good and normative values. For this group, pre-modern moral values are a source of democracy and the embodiment of the practice alternative to colonial power, the existence of the "necessary precondition for civil society – based on the autonomous intellectual as a moral agent ..."⁴

The system of values in Ukraine is still identified by corporative rules and norms rather than moral virtues or innovative ethos. The intellectual community depends on the cliental system; the state actively interfered in public and private spheres of civil society; national cultures were destroyed by the imperial power. Studies of the Ukrainian intellectual community today show the weakened virtues, social responsibility and sense of belonging to an authentic public sphere which could preserve the basic values of "conventional morality", could function as the foundation of an ethical framework of "universal moral principles" and norms in society. A famous researcher Jürgen Kocka has pointed out that

A moral foundation is important imperative in civil society that affords each individual the latitude for independent thought and action. Without ethical values a

4 Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society*, Toronto: The Free Press, 1992, p. 162.

free society would become a jungle while intellectuals would lose their core value functions.⁵

In this context we can observe a serious socio-cultural Central European influence on the dissident intellectual movements in Ukraine through the idea of “Ukrainian intellectual messianism” developed by Ukrainian theorist and poet Vasyl Stus under the influence of Jerzy Braun. The Ukrainian researcher wants the Ukrainian intellectual community to implement Christian values, in order to transform the Ukrainian people into a universal moral community. In the twentieth century the idea of a “universal society” as a society of total reconstruction of all social spheres, was incorporated into Ukrainian underground intellectual discourse and was conceived of as a combination of universalism and nationalism. The synthesis of these elements was interpreted in the categories of Ukrainian life-world and implemented to Ukrainian social theory by such Ukrainian theorists as Nikolay Vernadsky and Oleksa Berdnic. This intellectual tradition took as essential the idea of an individual relationship with the state, the problem of limited individual freedom and treated the community as the embodiment of the new intention being in opposition to colonial power.

Important steps in the shaping the Ukrainian version of the Central European intellectual frame were made by Pope John Paul II and Milan Kundera. The Pope’s idea of authentic democracy in the state of law as well as his maxim that “democracy without values easily proves to be camouflaged totalitarianism” was conceived by Ukrainian intellectual discourse as the very spirit of the new social order, the imperative of freedom, the moral factor of fighting against a totalitarian regime, the driving force of respect to traditions and civil society, the important imperative of social integration.

Central European discourse regarded the development of modernization and rationalization as related to the rejection of colonial discourse, the independence of high cultural patterns and everyday activities from total social regulation, breakdown of the frames of an imperial outlook and gradually increased efficiency of an independent social order. Evidently intellectuals were more oriented to the values of life-world, the patterns of social responsibility and national culture.

5 Jürgen Kocka and Allan Mitchell (eds), *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993, p. 53.

3. The Post-Soviet values of intellectual communities: the clash of discourses

In the context of the Ukrainian Post-Soviet transformation we can observe the process of rethinking the ethical and social role of the intellectual community, especially with regard to normative issues, as well as social ethics, corruption, personal attitude to pathologic violence and alienation, principles of social responsibility, cultural recognition and the preservation of a symbolic network. The modern social theory of modernization makes clear that Post-Soviet societies in the period of crisis cannot survive without some representation of the intellectual discourse of freedom, criticism of colonial power and support of value-normative principles and imperatives applied by the intellectual community. Even well-known researchers like Eleonora Narvselius, Leela Gandhi, Aleksandr Panarin, for whom intellectuals are a marginal, non-modernized group situated outside the sphere of basic social interests, agree that pragmatic and economic social priorities, combined with democratic social practice, have insufficient foundations for their being legitimate in a post-colonial society. A post-genocide society that experiences a loss of core values gives rise to the feeling of social entropy. That is why most of Ukrainian people feel a spiritual vacuum and corrosion, social anomy and an annihilation of cultural and civil life.

It is easy to predict the future of a society that lacks cultural and moral foundations. In the historical perspective such a society is not competitive, is an example of moral and spiritual stagnation, an embodiment of social disorder, destruction and conflict.

Despite Soviet stagnation and the Post-Soviet experience of social disorder and relativism, some intellectual groups in Ukraine connected with the old dissidents' initiative of "December 1st" are oriented towards serious moral priorities and normative demands to persons, social groups and communities. The formation of a new moral ethos was combined with the search for a new social paradigm, which would presuppose the transformations of bureaucratic power and the formation of social networks being based on the new rational foundations of social life.

The new purposes of some intellectuals are incompatible with the Soviet paradigm of economic determinism and exemplify new values of social responsibility, solidarity and moral dignity. We can observe the emergence of moral foundations for social hopes in some of the new social segments and groups, whose activities correlate with ethical priorities. The communities of school and

university teachers in the biggest cities of Western, Central and Eastern Ukraine (Lvov, Kiev, Drogobych, and Kharkov) are focused on the idea of humanity and God, share the idea of collective and individual responsibility for a common good, and the social development of an intellectual elite as a whole. These intellectual groups, led by persons like Miroslav Popovich and Yaroslav Hrytsak, seek to radically change the colonial discourse and make it more cultural, pragmatic, and more compatible with Western demands. New cultural discourse provides the intellectual basis for the promotion of social integration embedded in Christian values and the secular moral principles of a “universalistic society”, which is not xenophobic and not hostile to a democratic framework.

However, the Ukrainian reality tells us that the majority of intellectuals still have serious idiosyncrasy to social changes in the direction to European civilization and are more inclined to preserve their old social priorities, standards and values. Mr. Viktor Skopenko, former rector of Taras Shevchenko Kiev National University, pointed out that “the majority of intellectuals in Ukraine are a part of the old social system and don’t want radical changes of the Soviet paternalistic structure”.

He focused on the “conformism of intellectuals and their close ties to the social distribution system of the Soviet period, with centralized state support of budget-consuming groups”.⁶

The groups of intellectuals were examined by this researcher as an instrument of social manipulations by the power of the state. Evidently, such groups of intellectuals consider social conformism and collaboration with the values of the “Russian world” as more important than European ideas of cultural rootedness, social participation and innovative values. The Soviet outlook still dominates in the social life of Ukrainian youth and a great part of the intellectual elite. In the times of economic crisis and a crisis of values the majority of Ukrainian intellectuals feel permanent apathy and demoralization. There are no spiritual motivations for changes inside the intellectual community where a great part of intellectuals continue to serve as national agents of colonial power.

As a result, Ukrainian social and political life is considered by the European community through the stronger colonial discourse of the “Russian world”. In this context the problem of the social and ethical role of intellectuals and their

6 Viktor Skopenko, *Publichni vystupy* [Public presentations], Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Kyyivs’koho natsional’noho universytetu, 2003, p. 28.

cultural self-realization is centered on the issues of Said's post-colonial studies and the representation of a post-colonial culture by yet a stronger framework expressed by Spivak's question "can the subaltern speak?"⁷

The problem of Post-Soviet intellectuals is related to not only to the weaknesses of socio-cultural foundations for modernization, or lack of space for subsidiary ethnographic, academic and political components, but also the inability of the local community to suggest a new innovative model of social interaction inside civil society. The lack of reforms in public and private space, the absence of a solid background of national identity, purely instrumental program of the implementation of a new social project are serious obstacles for a positive social movement and reconstruction of social institutes.

At the same time, despite social amorphousness, the inability of the intelligentsia to implement innovative social ties and the lack of social mobility, domination of Soviet stereotypes and values of survival (R. Inglehart), public opinion polls during the last 10 years show significant constant increase of social support for the demands of moral sanitation. The last public opinion poll by the "Gorshenin institute" shows that about 45% of Ukrainians support the last propositions of the "December 1st" intellectual movement, the idea of the moral "sanitation" of our society and the rotation of authorities of all levels. At the same time, only 15% to 18% of respondents emphasized that intellectuals as a community can be "a driving force of social reforms and the source of shaping innovative social networks" in the cities.⁸ The respondents focused on the weakness of entrepreneurial communities and their inability to implement reforms, and, on the other hand, pointed out that the modernization mission of intellectuals has a normative foundation and is based on the principles of self-government, the values of civil society and the renovation of a national identity.

In reality the process of social changes inside of civil society, as well as intellectual proliferation of innovative knowledge and a new model of social relationship in which knowledge can transform power, "changing it from a monolithic apparatus accumulated within the state into a web-like force which is confirmed and articulated through the every-day changes of 'know how' or infor-

7 Gayatri Ch. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak", in: Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxist Interpretations of Culture*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Education Press, 1985, p. 283.

8 Kostiantyn Bondarenko, "Opytuvannya hromads'koyi dumky instytutu im. Horshenina" [Public Opinion Poll by the Gorshenin Institute], 2012, p. 8.

mation which animate social life”,⁹ are all possible only in the social context where intellectuals are supported by other middle class groups. This maxim was shared by Sneja Gunew, who pointed out that “power in an innovative society is reproduced in discursive networks at every point where someone who knows is instructing someone who doesn’t know”.¹⁰

Thus, we can observe the clash of discourses inside intellectual communities: the first one represents intellectual orientation to innovative practice as well as civil society values which serve as a prerequisite of the formation of a post-conventional morality, whereas the second one represents the rudiments of the Soviet ethos that do not conform to such fundamental values as morality, truth, justice, solidarity and confidence.

The new innovative Ukrainian intellectual movement focuses on the Pope’s account of social reconstruction, in which he criticizes Post-Soviet social structure after the collapse of communism. His principles of a “universal society” were associated with the ideas of justice, truth, morality, beauty and were conceptually contrasted with the practice of state interventions into public and private sphere, the restriction of civil freedom and social alienation. The latter model resulted in the atomization of a previously organic structure, loss of intrinsic potency of the social system, the degradation of a life-world. The alienation of intellectuals who lost their old Soviet income, social guaranties and previous social role in society, led to a decline of moral norms among them. In this context it is easy to see a point in the moral resistance of Ukrainians to their authorities.

A moral view was represented by Yevhen Sverstyuk, a Ukrainian writer and very famous person of the “December 1st” movement. He pointed out that intellectual and cultural activity is connected to “moral and spiritual renovation in society, in which social priorities and a value framework must be changed, and the social ties and mutual supports must be improved”.¹¹ Yevhen Sverstyuk emphasizes the “mission of the new innovative class” in Ukraine and its social role as a moral authority and spiritual force in society that is a part of Christian civilization. The ethical position of this researcher was supported by other active social persons and communities in both Eastern and Western Ukraine protesting

9 Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory. A Critical Introduction*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 74.

10 Sneja Gunew, *Feminist Knowledge. Critique and Construct*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 75.

11 Yevhen Sverstyuk, *Svitlo nashoyi nadiyi. Zibrannya I Hrudnya* [The Light of our Hope. The first December’s meeting], Kiev 2012, p. 15.

against corruption and nepotism, shrinking moral space and a reduction of normative foundations.

In this context it is evident that the moral position of intellectuals becomes institutionalized in the social space and can play a crucial role in introducing new values to society. At the same time one can observe serious obstacles for innovative changes in society, where more than 60% of people declare their adherence to a “shadow economy” patterns and standards of a primitive practice of survival.

Unfortunately, our society lacks the foundations for innovative cooperation on a moral basis as well as innovative intellectual ethics. Intellectuals as a Post-Soviet social group are generally frustrated, morally degraded and oriented mostly to material values. Approximately 65% of them have participated in this or that corruption activity and participate in questionable forms of a shadow economy. Tadeusz Buksiński pointed out that “corruption, nepotism ... have reached epidemic proportions in those countries which emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union”.¹² This corruption pattern is supported by both authorities and society as a normal element of social functioning.

The majority of Ukrainian intellectuals, in sharp contrast to Eastern and Central European ones, are separated from Christian norms and a historical past as well as from a Christian cultural background. The social roots and critical voice of the intellectual elite is very feeble. As Michel Foucault pointed out the activity of intellectuals does not emanate from some central hierarchy as a “madhouse or prison, but flows through society in a sort of capillary action: power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere”.¹³

Evidently, even famous intellectuals, those who are mostly oriented to Ukrainian national tradition, tend to tolerate the ugly forms of corruption and injustice. Post-Soviet intellectuals continue to be a part of a colonial bureaucratic social system, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The tendency to subjugation and corruption was deeply rooted in the cliental model of relationship, where the expansion of vertical power over public space is the strategic goal of state authorities.

12 Tadeusz Buksiński, *Liberalization and Transformation of Morality in Post-Communist Countries. The Case of Poland*, Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001, p. 90.

13 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, New York: Harvester Press, 1981, p. 93.

At the same time a smaller part of the Post-Soviet intellectuals have firm moral convictions and are focused on various dimensions of “moral capital”. The new innovative intellectuals and dissident community of the intelligentsia are more oriented to their moral mission in society, cultural protection and implementation of the ideal of national revitalization. Their purpose is social transformation based not so much on personal changes in the political sphere but rather on those forms of culture which are connected with the moral shifting and de-sovietization of Ukrainian society.

4. Conclusion

This study brings into focus the issues of the role of Ukrainian intellectuals in the value-normative processes in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine. It demonstrates that intellectual community is the embodiment of antonymic values: on the one hand, the values of social integration, the ethic of moral responsibility of people for common good, the cultural resurgence and social reconstruction of the post-Soviet society on innovative foundations; on the other hand, the ethos of cliental subjugation to power in a post-genocide society with no free space for collective and individual identity. The voices of intellectuals are in many ways not decisive in the discussions about the process of the modernization of Ukrainian society.

We can summarize that the intellectual community as a whole cannot be the driving force of complete transformation of social life due the strong connection with the old colonial discourse of cultural subjugation as well as the feudal practice of patron-client social relationship. At the same time, our society has a hope for future transformations in the context of increasing role of some intellectual groups in Ukraine in relation to synthesis of pre-modern and modern values. The new intellectual group (“December 1st”) is a significant spiritual force, which can promote social transformation and innovative process. In its activity we can see a good examples for future transformation: a source of innovativeness and morality as well as tendency towards self-transcendence and openness to change. The priorities of its members are based on religious and cultural dimensions of social development and rejection of economic determinism and functionalism. One can observe the new priorities in society at both individual and collective levels. The formation of new reality has to be accompanied by creation of a new system of values in our society that has to replace the old and conservative social order in a broader historical perspective.