

Autocephaly: A Delayed Transition from Empire to National State?

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The influence of the Orthodox churches on state and nation building processes in post-1989 Europe remains an important research topic which is still under theorized.¹ Especially after the collapse of the Communist regimes, the increased role of the Orthodox churches in shaping the polity of the new national states has moved from the realm of the private into the political and should thus not only concern theological researchers but also historians and political scientists.

Both, political elites in a state polity as well as church elites in Orthodoxy are bound by peculiar institutional heritages. Although these institutionalized heritages may vary to a certain extent, due to the different laws these groups are subject to (priests are bound to canonical law, while politicians are not), common institutional heritages are often overlooked. Although churches are no longer subject to direct government orders from above, the socialization of church elites and the support they receive from the political hierarchy matter. These interactions shape the political and church hierarchy in a dialectic way and thus Orthodox thought.

There is often a tendency to treat the Orthodox Church as a single and unanimous actor. Matsuzato argues that due to the fact that the Orthodox Church is regulated by the seven Ecumenical Councils (fourth to eighth centuries A. D.), "Orthodox politics are supra-national and relatively independent from secular politics; thus, the widespread understanding of Orthodoxy as a caesaropapist religion should be questioned."² Matsuzato is correct that formal church regulations are largely unified among the mutually recognized churches. However, interpretations of these regulations often differ so widely that any assumptions about the overarching unity of the church prove problematic. Differences among the Orthodox churches are so huge that it is hard to speak

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1 This paper is limited to the analysis of Eastern Orthodox churches. Oriental Orthodox churches, which recognize only three ecumenical councils, are not part of this analysis.

2 Kimitaka Matsuzato, "Inter-Orthodox Relations and Transborder Nationalities in and around Unrecognised Abkhazia and Transnistria," *Religion, State & Society* 37:3 (2009), p. 239.

about *the* Orthodox Church but rather about Orthodox churches. This is especially true on issues of nationalism. Since the church elites are socialized in different contexts shaping their religious interpretation and since church laws can be interpreted differently, it is difficult to speak about a unified canon. As a result, different churches with different self-understandings of their elites produce differing canonical interpretations. The various theological debates on crucial issues such as autocephaly and canonic territory are a case in point. Payne has noted in this context: "What resulted from the ecclesiastical conflicts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the destruction of the Orthodox commonwealth into independent nationalist churches."³

Currently there are seven functioning Orthodox communities that are not recognized by their mother churches and/or by the Patriarchate in Constantinople.⁴ A pure focus on the theological debate in interpreting intra-Orthodox politics may thus lead to overlooking the political reality of these quarrelling groups. Differing interpretations of religious understandings are often seen as a deviation from the standard. Since such "standard" itself is not unanimous and depends on the point of view of the claimant, an analytical definition of such standard cannot be made. Due to the existing analytical bias in favor of the canonical churches, so called "uncanonical" churches and their influence on the political elite are often overlooked, although they shape both the political decisions of their host states and Orthodoxy as well. In order to get a complete picture it is therefore necessary to include all organizations in the analysis, when talking about Orthodoxy.

As Matsuzato has noted: "Orthodoxy was born as a religion of empire and has remained such."⁵ This paper would like to expand this argument. It argues that those churches that had a privileged role in an empire, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the Russian Empire and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (EPC) in the Ottoman Empire remain within the imperial paradigm. On the other hand, those churches that have been significantly restructured during the national state era in the nineteenth century and were able to free themselves from the tutelage of the EPC adhere to an expansive ethno-confessional principle. These churches were able to carve out a middle course between the imperial and nation state paradigm. In the self-understanding of these churches, "the concept of the local church was transformed into the national church."⁶ Thus they claim jurisdiction over regions located outside

3 Daniel P. Payne, "Nationalism and the Local Church: The Source of Ecclesiastical Conflict in the Orthodox Commonwealth," *Nationalities Papers* 35:5 (2007), p. 834.

4 These communities are the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kiev Patriarchate, the Abkhazian Orthodox Church, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church—Alternative synod.

5 Matsuzato, "Inter-Orthodox Relations," p. 240.

6 Payne, "Nationalism and the Local Church," p. 835.

of their current political borders. The basis of such claims is that the territory and their inhabitants historically belonged to a larger ethno-confessional state formation that still constitutes the canonical territory of the church. This is especially evident in the cases of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), the Romanian Orthodox Church (RomOC) and—until the Second World War—the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC). In contrast, those churches created after the collapse of empires and those churches claiming autocephaly but not yet recognized are driven by a non-expansive national state paradigm. They claim influence limited to the borders of their country of residence. Examples of such churches are the Ukrainian Orthodox Church—Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP), the Montenegrin Orthodox Church (MOC) and the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MaOC).⁷

THEORY

The influence of national discourses and their role in shaping what can be described as the institutionalized discursive pattern of society is well explained by the theory of discursive institutionalism (DI), the fourth stream of the neo-institutionalist debate. This theory provides a more dynamic approach to institutional change by focusing on ideas and discourses in politics and their role in forming and shaping institutions. Scholars using DI share four main views: First, the centrality of ideas and discourses. Second, the institutional framing of such ideas and discourses. Third, the embedding of ideas in a contextual meaning and discourses in a certain logic of communication. Fourth, a more dynamic view of change induced by ideas and discourses.⁸ DI sees institutions more as dynamic and agent-centered since “they are not external-rule-following structures but rather are simultaneously structures and constructs internal to agents whose ‘background ideational abilities’ within a given ‘meaning context’ explain how institutions are created and exist and whose ‘foreground discursive abilities,’ following the ‘logic of communication,’ explain how institutions change or persist.”⁹ In DI, “institutions are internal to agents, serving both as structures (of thinking, saying, and acting) that constrain actors and as constructs (of thinking, saying, and acting) created and changed by those

7 Although these churches also claim jurisdiction over parishes abroad, they can be still classified as following the non-expansive national state paradigm. This is because their claims are in countries, such as the US and Argentina that did not historically belong to the larger ethno-nation-state formation. Unlike the RomOC in Moldova or the SOC in Macedonia, the UOC-KP or the MOC in the US are aware of their minority status on that continent and do not claim sole jurisdiction over the territory for all Orthodox believers but only over those sharing an ethno-cultural commonality.

8 Vivien A. Schmidt, “Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008), p. 304.

9 Schmidt, “Discursive Institutionalism,” p. 303.

actors.”¹⁰ The insights of this theory thus enable the researcher to analyze the dialectic relationship between Orthodox thought and the national discourses in a given polity.

Historically there has been a strong connection between the state and the church in Orthodox countries. Potz has argued that according to the concept of *Symphonia* “the participation of political power in church affairs was not only recognized, but the Orthodox emperor’s commitment to protect the faith was asked for. This belief in the task of state power has been valid until the twentieth century and is currently inspiring some fundamentalistic concepts in countries with an Orthodox tradition.”¹¹ According to the understanding of *Symphonia* in the Byzantine tradition “God had ordained two separate but interrelated authorities over the people. Those who wielded political power and were charged with creating order and peace on earth, and those who were charged with the spiritual well-being of the people, ensuring their salvation and preparing them for the Kingdom of Heaven. Human society would function properly only when these two authorities were balanced and existed together in harmony (**Symphonia**), each supreme in its own sphere of activity and each deferring to the other.”¹² The strong interdependence between the imperial political and ecclesiastical discourse that had its origins in the legal and political framework of Byzantium and was later joined by the national discourse that developed in the late nineteenth century. Orthodox churches lack a central discourse producing a center similar to the Vatican. They were therefore greatly influenced by the national discourses of the late nineteenth century that occurred within their respective spheres of activity. On the other hand, the producers of the national discourse were equally influenced by their respective Orthodox Church. This mutual influence, as well as the lack of protection outside its respective political unit, was the basis for the dependence that characterizes the church-state relationship in Orthodoxy.

The institutionalized discursive pattern on how a certain polity is conceived had a strong effect on both the state and church actors. As the study shall show further, there was a convergence in how the nation was “imagined”¹³ by

10 Vivien A. Schmidt, “From Historical Institutionalism to Discursive Institutionalism: Explaining Change in Comparative Political Economy,” p. 15. Paper prepared for presentation at the American Political Science Association Meetings (Boston, August 2008). Revision of a paper presented at the biannual meeting of the Council for European Studies (Chicago, March 6–8, 2008).

11 Richard Potz, “State and Church in the European Countries with an Orthodox Tradition,” *Derecho y Religión* 2 (2008), p. 35.

12 Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *An Examination of Church-state Relations in the Byzantine and Russian Empires with an Emphasis on Ideology and Models of Interaction* [Studies in Religion and Society, Vol. 52] (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2001), pp. 86–87.

13 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]).

the clerical, political and intellectual elite in the political unit. Churches reflected to a large extent their respective state policies. All this resulted in the creation of different self-understandings in each church.

Historians generally distinguish two discursive patterns on how a certain polity is defined: the national discourse and the empire discourse. According to Kappeler, an empire is understood as “a composed governing unity with a metropolis that controls various peripheral territories and its culturally alien populations, while simultaneously asserting universal claims.”¹⁴ Based on the previous research of Jürgen Osterhammel, Ricarda Vulpius has summarized eight criteria for differentiating between a national state and an empire:

	Nation state	Empire
Borders	Clear and fixed borders	Blurred borders
Population	Homogeneity and unity	Heterogeneity and difference
Legitimacy of rule	People as sovereign “bottom up”	Divine ruler “top down”
Citizens rights	Equal rights regulated by citizenship	Hierarchically granted, different group rights
Cultural unity	Cultural commonality between the entire population	Cultural commonality only between the members of the ruling elite
Attitude to difference	Tendency to leveling and equal treatment	Claim of cultural superiority and “civilization” as a mission
Genesis	Historic roots of the putative nation	Results of treaties and wars
Territory	Historical territory, sacred memories	Extensive relationship. Territory seen as usable land.

Source: Vulpius, “Das Imperium als Thema der Russischen Geschichte,” pp. 9-13.

As the following sections demonstrate, the churches of the Ottoman and Russian empires, the EPC and the ROC fall into the empire paradigm. They are overinclusive in their definition of who constitutes their flock, accept cultural and language differences and view their borders in a wider sense that go beyond the current political realities. The churches of the Balkans can be rather described as national state churches but with some expansive elements common for churches of empires. They are overinclusive in their definition of who constitutes their flock, but unlike the churches of the empires, tend to deny cultural and language difference. They are equally expansive in their territorial conception, going beyond the current political borders. On the other hand, the post-imperial churches that fit in the nation state paradigm are limited to their current political borders and are exclusive to who constitutes their flock and deny cultural and language differences.

14 Kappeler quoted in Ricarda Vulpius, “Das Imperium als Thema der Russischen Geschichte: Tendenzen und Perspektiven der jüngeren Forschung,” *Zeitenblicke* 6:2 (2007), pp. 1-14.

THE CHURCHES OF THE OTTOMAN AND RUSSIAN EMPIRES

Although the Christian churches in the Ottoman Empire were structurally discriminated against, the Ottoman rulers granted specific rights to confessional groups which included a system of self-governance according to what was widely known as the *millet* system. Until the Tanzimat reforms (1839–1878) the understanding of the word *millet* was limited to that of a confessional group. This interpretation favored the EPC that was seen as the main representative of the Christian population. The proximity of the EPC to the Sublime Porte and the fact that the church clergy conducted services mainly in Greek rather than in the local languages increased opposition against the *Phanariote* administration of the church.¹⁵ In the late nineteenth century the Ottoman administration's understanding of the word *millet* changed. Apart from religion, language was now an important group border marker. As a result, group rights were now granted according to these categories. This in turn allowed the local *millet* elites to demand self-governance and the (re-) establishment of national churches. While the new reality was a substantial gain for the ethno-confessional churches, the EPC lost its privileged status. Although it remained *primus inter pares* among the Eastern Orthodox churches, its powers decreased significantly. After the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the secularization processes in Turkey, the Symphonia between the ruler and the church was virtually non-existent. Today the EPC remains an enclave in a country oscillating between a secular and an Islamic state concept, widely detached from the political sphere of Turkey. The EPC currently claims jurisdiction over the worldwide Orthodox Diasporas in Europe, America, Australia and Britain, which are not under the jurisdiction of the autocephalous churches. This claim is based on an interpretation of the second part of the Canon of the Council of Chalcedon by the EPC that differs from the interpretation of the ROC and thus causes conflict between the two churches. The core of these conflicts is that the EPC sees its jurisdiction over those Orthodox believers residing outside of the territories of their mother churches, regardless of their language. The ROC in turn sees those people as their flock, if they are Russian speakers.¹⁶ Having its jurisdiction over Orthodox communities located in various states and nations within a larger border span legitimated by historic treaties, the EPC remained in its self-understanding a church of an empire.

As a church of the Russian Empire, the ROC had strong ties to the tsarist regime, which portrayed itself as a protector of the Orthodox faith. Interpretations of the people (*narod*) were thus largely convergent between the church

15 Phanariotes were named after a quarter in Constantinople inhabited mainly by Greeks and is the location of the Patriarch of Constantinople.

16 Anargyros Anapliotis, "Der Kanon 28 von Chalcedon: Ein kirchenrechtlicher Zankapfel der interorthodoxen und ökumenischen Beziehungen (auch in Westeuropa)," *Una Sancta. Zeitschrift für ökumenische Begegnung* 3 (2008), pp. 200–206.

and the state during the tsarist period. Before the October Revolution, the meaning of the word *narod* emphasized the importance of the Russian folk or people. The *narod*, in this sense, was the peasantry—the carrier of the features of the Russian nation. Similar to the Ottoman Empire, the ruling elites viewed Russia as an empire that legitimized itself in dynastic and autocratic terms. Its borders were a consequence of wars and treaties rather than the nation's will to self-determination. The Church benefitted from the expansion of the Russian Empire. By bringing existing Orthodox churches in the conquered territories under its control, or by establishing new parishes there, the ROC was able to expand its ecclesiastical borders and thus its influence. Just as it was the case in the pre-Tanzimat Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire granted group-rights mainly on the basis of religious belonging. Due to the convergence between the religion of the ruler and the church, Orthodoxy was structurally favored. National categories were viewed in a much wider sense and seen mostly in cultural-Orthodox terms. Once a person was in command of the Russian language, baptized as an Orthodox Christian, and assimilated into the dominant Russian culture, he or she was seen as a Russian—regardless of his or her descent. Since the 1830s, this was especially true for the Ukrainians and Belarussians, who were not only seen as part of the Russian nation, but were actually forced to integrate and assimilate. Other Orthodox believers, such as the Moldovan/Romanian speakers of Bessarabia, the Greek and Bulgarian colonists, the Armenians, Georgians, baptized Muslims and baptized Siberian Animists were also seen as Russians in a wider sense. This concept, however, did not apply to the Poles, who were not perceived as Russians and could not become Russian by virtue of their linguistic and religious differences.¹⁷

The outbreak of the October Revolution interrupted and re-defined the existing church-state relations. The Russian Bolsheviks developed a concept of the nation and state that was quite different from the existing tsarist and clerical worldview. In their approach, they combined rights of self-determination with a strong socialist content and hoped that the latter would make the former obsolete and theoretical.¹⁸ By adhering to the formula “national in form—socialist in content,” their initial aim was to move from a pre-national dynastic order directly to a post-national, proletarian-internationalist one and thus effectively skip the nation-state phase.¹⁹ This concept, however, was never put into practice. Stalin, the main ideologue of the national question in the Soviet Union provided an understanding of the nation and its relation to the state that served as a template for forming all subsequent worldviews on the subject throughout Soviet history. Stalin argued that the nation is defined by

17 Andreas Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung - Geschichte - Zerfall*, revised ed. (München: Beck, 2001), p. 228.

18 Edward W. Walker, *Dissolution: Sovereignty and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), p. 23.

19 Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich*, p. 301.

certain “objective” characteristics, such as descent, national character and language. This definition strengthened the ethno-national element in the national discourse.²⁰

However, a striking contradiction existed between the officially sanctioned definition of a nation and the ideological socialist doctrine of creating an International of workers and toiling people, devoid of cleavages along ethno-national lines and united through the class struggle. Soviet historians faced a dilemma due to the incompatibility between Marxist theory, which sees class as the main actor in human society, and a nationalist-patriotic interpretation that instead views the nation as the main actor. Depending on their own world-views, historians would stress one element over the other, often failing to make clear distinctions between the two ideologies. This tendency often produced blurred and contradictory interpretations. This was largely possible because of the polysemy of the word *narod*, which could be interpreted as meaning both “nation” in an ethno-national sense and “people” in the Marxist class sense. Soviet politicians and historians often used the two narratives simultaneously and interchangeably in order to suit their particular purposes.

The use of Russian as a language of communication, and the proximity to Russian culture that this engendered, created a specific sort of self-understanding among speakers of Russian (not only ethnic Russians) that could be described as *Sovietness*. What was problematic about the notion of Sovietness was not so much its failure to take root among the population—indeed many people did identify as Soviets²¹—but the existence of this concept exclusively within the totalitarian framework. Thus, when the dominant ideology collapsed, the supranational identities pertaining to Sovietness were discredited, as they could not exist outside the ethnic framework. Furthermore, the cultural legacy of Russianness and its significant overlap with Sovietness can be considered another factor for the reluctance of non-Russian speaking nations to identify with a Soviet identity. It was, in fact, not perceived as truly supranational, but rather as associated with Russian cultural hegemony.

When Soviet communism collapsed in the late 1980s, the aforementioned contradiction between class and nation in the interpretative framework of Soviet historiography also fell by the wayside. At this point, the nation superseded class as the main focus of action. This facilitated an interpretation of history based exclusively on common descent and features. The erosion of the Soviet regime further led to a gradual weakening of the center. **While the Soviet** core was associated with communist ideology, counter-elites began to emerge on the level of the constituent republics of the former Soviet Union. Thus, the

20 Iosif Stalin, “Marksizm i natsional’nyi vopros,” in Iosif Stalin, ed., *Marksizm i natsional’no-kolonial’nyi vopros. Sbornik izbrannykh statei i rechei* (Moscow: Partiinoe izdatel’stvo, 1934), pp. 3–45.

21 On Sovietness see, David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

struggle against the communist regime took place in national terms. The failure of the center to **provide legitimate structures facilitated the emergence of exclusive ethnic nationalisms** as the most dynamic force in politics. The reference to nationalism was very appealing, as it provided the elites within the constituent republics with both legitimacy against the center (**in referring to rights of self-determination**) and a possibility to use the institutionally available (national) resources.

The ROC in turn was able to attract both Russian nationalists as well as those who saw themselves as Soviets, even if they did not necessarily adhere to communist values. This was mainly because the church filled the ideological gap left by the demise of communism with Orthodox values. Since it viewed the *narod* in a wider imperial sense, it did not need to resolve the problematic cultural overlap between Russianness and Sovietness. It carried on these notions by simply replacing the Soviet man doctrine with the Orthodox man doctrine. Rousselet and Agadjanian rightly observed a “semantic” shift in the discourse of the ROC after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a massive Russian speaking Orthodox diaspora in the newly independent states. The connection between **Russianness and Orthodoxy became more pronounced** and the church “ceased to be limited to the Russian and Soviet Empire and became ‘transnational’.”²² The ROC currently sees itself as a multinational church with a wider territorial span than the current Russian Federation.²³ Its canonical territory includes (with the exception of Georgia and Armenia) thirteen former Soviet Republics. Articles 1 and 3 of its statutes read as follows:

“(1) The Russian Orthodox Church is a multinational Local Autocephalous Church in doctrinal unity and in prayerful and canonical communion with other Local Orthodox Churches. [...]

(3) The jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church shall include persons of Orthodox confession living on the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldavia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Turkmenia, Uzbekistan and Estonia, and also Orthodox Christians living in other countries and voluntarily joining this jurisdiction.”²⁴

22 Alexander Agadjanian and Kathy Rousselet, “Globalization and Identity Discourse in Russian Orthodoxy,” in Victor Roudometof and Alexander Agadjanian, eds., *Eastern Orthodoxy in a Global Age: Tradition Faces the Twenty-first Century* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2005), p. 41.

23 Andrew Evans, “Forced Miracles: The Russian Orthodox Church and Postsoviet International Relations,” *Religion, State & Society* 30:1 (2002), pp. 33–43.

24 Russian Orthodox Church “Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church.” Official website of the Department for External Church Relations. Available from <http://www.mospat.ru/en/documents/ustav/i/>.

The current Patriarch of Russia, Kirill, explains what he means by the term *Russian*. According to his interpretation, it means the following:

“The church is called ‘Russian’ not for ethnic reasons. This naming indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church fulfills **its shepherd mission among those people**, adopting the Russian spiritual and cultural tradition as a basis for their national identity, or, at least, as their essential element. This is why, in this context, we regard Moldova as part of the Russian World [*Russkii mir*, D. Z.]. At the same time the Russian Church is the most multinational Orthodox church in the world and aspires to develop its multinational character.”²⁵

Since the beginning of the Putin administration, the ROC forged close ties with the Russian government—especially in the area of Russia’s foreign policy. Both the church and state have worked hand in hand to achieve what can be described as “spiritual security.” According to this concept, Russia has to ensure its domination in the *Russian World* in order to secure the spiritual well-being of the Russian diaspora (defined in a wider sense as all Russian speakers, regardless of their ethnicity) by protecting it from Western influence and allow it to maintain its spiritual unity with their homeland, based on its Russian identity.²⁶

With its imperial interpretation of its canonical territory, the ROC is—in ter alia—in conflict with the EPC. While the conflict over the Orthodox Church in Estonia has been largely solved,²⁷ the issue of jurisdiction over the Russian speaking diaspora is still an open point. This combination of an expansive territorial view and an expansive cultural civilization mission centered on the Russian language shows that the ROC is still largely a church of an empire.

THE CHURCHES OF THE BALKANS

Unlike the ROC the SOC, the RomOC and the BOC were for most of their history part of a larger imperial structure—the Ottoman Empire. While the ROC that had a privileged status in the Russian Empire, relations between these Balkan churches and the Ottoman rulers were problematic. As mentioned above, the millet system favored the EPC as the central organization for the Balkan churches. This led to the subordination of the BOC, the SOC and the RomOC under the jurisdiction of the EPC. The Balkan populations and their Orthodox

25 Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia, “*Russkii mir: Puti ukrepleniia i razvitiia*,” *Tserkov’ i vremia* 49:4 (2009), pp. 5–16. Available from <http://www.mospat.ru/churchtime/churchtime49.pdf>. (6).

26 For a broader discussion see, Daniel P. Payne, “Spiritual Security, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Foreign Ministry: Collaboration or Cooptation?” *Journal of Church and State* 52:4 (2010), pp. 712–727; Robert C. Blitt, “Russia’s ‘Orthodox’ Foreign Policy: The Growing Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Shaping Russia’s Policies Abroad,” *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 33:2 (2011), pp. 363–460.

27 Payne, “Nationalism and the Local Church,” pp. 840–841.

churches were thus under what can be described as the “double yoke,” as they had to defend themselves against their Ottoman overlords on one hand and their Hellenized clerical authorities on the other.²⁸ It was only in the latter nineteenth century when the autonomy of these churches was created or restored.

The SOC can be seen as the cradle of Serb national awakening. It assumed the role of the guardian of what it defined as national culture and traditions of the Serbian people.²⁹ Two revolts against the Ottoman rulers in 1593 and 1689 were encouraged by the SOC. In 1766, the Ottomans abolished the Serbian Patriarchate and brought it under the control of the EPC. Slavonic liturgy was replaced by Greek. To appease the Serbs, the Sultan had finally granted them a right to self-government in 1830 and in 1831; the SOC was freed from Greek tutelage.³⁰ While the nascent Serbian state consolidated its independence, Orthodoxy became the strongest marker of nationhood. This was mainly in light of the fact that language was a weak boundary marker—especially towards the Croats that shared the same idiom.

Unlike the Serbs, for whom the Orthodox faith was a boundary marker against the Catholic Croats, the Romanians were split between Orthodox believers and those Eastern Rite Catholic believers who recognized the supremacy of the Pope in Rome. During the period of national awakening in the nineteenth century, the Romantic nationalists thus centered their nation-building project first on the Romanian language and then on the Orthodox faith. As White argues, it was not the Orthodox Church—controlled mainly by the Serbs and strongly Hellenized by the Greeks—but rather the Habsburg-friendly Eastern Rite Catholic Church that brought about the national “awakening.” Its members included key clerical figures from the Transylvanian School that played a role in defining the boundaries of the Romanian nation. As the Eastern Rite Catholic church recognized the supremacy of the Pope, its clerics came into contact with Rome and other Central and Western European ideas that influenced their thinking.³¹ Relations between the RomOC and the state grew strong at the end of the nineteenth century. Under Alexandru Ion Cuza (1820–1873) the church was brought under the state’s tutelage and effectively became a state institution after proclaiming its autocephaly from Constantinople in 1872.

It is noteworthy that—compared to the SOC and the RomOC—the BOC was not part of the “national myth.” Discourses such as the heavenly people

28 Payne, “Nationalism and the Local Church,” p. 833.

29 For details on the relationship between the SOC and Serbian national identity see Christos Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals: The Quest for Eternal Identity* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2003).

30 Pedro Ramet, “Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslavia,” in Pedro Ramet, ed., *Religion and Nationalism in Soviet and East European Politics* [Duke Press Policy Studies] (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1984), pp. 152–153.

31 George W. White, *Nationalism and Territory: Constructing Group Identity in Southeastern Europe* [Geographical perspectives on the human past] (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 119–128.

(*nebeskii narod*) and the perpetual suffering of the Orthodox Serbs were largely absent in the Bulgarian discourse. Since the BOC was detached rather late from the EPC, the church tended to acquire Hellenistic overtones serving the EPC. Thus the BOC did not have a strong effect in forming a national consciousness. Bogomilova attributes this absence further to the rival national discourses oscillating between a Slavo-centric discourse with Russian domination, a Euro-centric with Western European domination and a Bulgaro-centric discourse “based on a unique religious-pagan synthesis, the unique features of the Bulgarian national character.”³² In all three discourses the church did not play a significant role.

The struggle against Hellenic domination directed against the EPC was fought fiercely in the case of the BOC. While the autocephaly of the SOC and the RomOC that were a negotiated settlement, the independence of the BOC was accompanied by quarrels between the EPC and the BOC. In 1870, the Sublime Porte decided to restore the autonomy of the BOC. In his decree (firman) the Sultan ruled in favor of the Bulgarians.³³ As a result the BOC was accused of the sin of *phyletism* (i.e. the separation of the church along ethnic lines) and its clergymen were excommunicated in 1872 by the EPC. The schism lasted until 1945. The EPC criticized the BOC for over emphasizing the ethno-national principle over the geographic principle. The EPC argued that: “the majority of originally founded Christian churches had a local character. They unified believers of a certain city or a certain region without differentiating by origin. They were usually named after a city or region. The ethnic origin of its believers did not play the least role.”³⁴ It is noteworthy that the EPC excommunicated the BOC not for establishing their own church, but for creating a church solely on ethnic lines and thus violating the self-understanding of the EPC.³⁵ The imperial understanding of the EPC clearly conflicted with the ethno-national understanding of the BOC.

Altogether, after the national awakening in the late nineteenth century had taken place, the Balkan churches cooperated with the national elites and supported them in their expansive nationalist views. After the establishment of the national state of the Serbs in 1878, the political and clerical elite followed a course of expansive nationalism. The category *Serb* was applied in a wider sense towards the Catholic and Muslim populations sharing a common idiom that were called Catholic Serbs and Muslim Serbs respectively. The Macedo-

32 Nonka Bogomilova, “The Religious Situation in Contemporary Bulgaria, and in Serbia and Montenegro: Differences and Similarities,” *Religion in Eastern Europe* 25:4 (2005), pp. 6–7.

33 Spas T. Raikin, “Nationalism and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church,” in Ramet, ed., *Religion and Nationalism*, p. 189.

34 See “Patriarchats- und Synodalurkunden zur bulgarischen Frage [August 1872],” pp. 405–416, quoted in: Maximos von Sardes, *Das ökumenische Patriarchat in der orthodoxen Kirche: Auftrag zur Einigung* (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1980), p. 399.

35 Payne, “Nationalism and the Local Church,” p. 836.

nians, whose territory was joined to Serbia only after 1912–13, were considered Southern Serbs. Their distinctive linguistic identity was not recognized, although their idiom was closer to Bulgarian than to Serbian. The transfer of the Orthodox Macedonian Church from the jurisdiction of the EPC to the SOC led to a conflict with the BOC that—in line with the political elite—considered the Macedonians as Bulgarians and thus the church as their canonical territory.³⁶ Both churches argued from an expansive ethnic principle. A second conflict line occurred between the ROC and the RomOC over the inhabitants of Bessarabia. While the RomOC argues from an expansive ethnic principle, claiming jurisdiction over the territory on the basis of ethnic belonging, the line of argument of the ROC is an imperial one, claiming jurisdiction on a supra-ethnic belonging defined widely as the *Russkii mir*.³⁷

For the Serb political elite, the Serb church hierarchy and especially for King Alexander, the creation of Yugoslavia was interpreted as the culmination of the Serbs' struggle for statehood. There was a considerable overlap between the categories of Serb and Yugoslav. Thus, many non-Serbs had difficulty identifying with this interpretation.³⁸

After World War II, the Partisans were able to reunite Yugoslavia under Tito's lead. While the first Yugoslavia was a national state united under a Serb royal dynasty, the second Yugoslavia defined itself as a nation of toilers and workers united under the ideological banner of achieving a communist society. A new interpretative framework for introducing national identity was introduced: *Communism*.

The Yugoslav communists faced the same interpretative problem as the Soviets. The theoretical incompatibility between the Marxist theory, which sees class as the main actor, and the nationalistic-patriotic interpretation, which treats the nation as the main actor, was the Achilles heel for most communist regimes, including Yugoslavia. Tito initially differed from Edvard Kardelj—the most prominent ideologist on the matter—on how to resolve the Yugoslav national question. While the latter insisted on the preservation of the individual nations and saw Yugoslavism as an ideological supra-national category defined through socialism, Tito saw Yugoslavism as a national category that would substitute individual national categories. He understood *Yugoslav* as being South-Slavic which did not include the Albanians, but was expansive towards all South Slavic nations, including the Bulgarians, with whom he

36 For details on the Macedonian Question see Paul Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question* [East Central European studies of Columbia University] (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 144–183; as well as Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History and Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 307–328.

37 For details see Dareg A. Zabarah, "The Role of the Orthodox Churches in Defining the Nation in Post-Soviet Moldova," *Südosteuropa* 59:2 (2011), pp. 214–237.

38 Dejan Djokić, "(Dis)Integrating Yugoslavia," in Dejan Djokić, ed., *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918–1992* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 151.

even tired to establish a federation in 1948.³⁹ The ultimate goal of merging the nation(s) in a new Yugoslav community, however, was never specifically pursued and Yugoslav rulers never elaborated in detail on a concept of a Yugoslav nation. Apart from a short-lived project of Yugoslavism initiated in the second half of the 1950s and halted abruptly by Tito himself in the 1960s, the nations remained the centre of focus for the Yugoslav communists.⁴⁰ The doctrines of “new historical communities” in the 1960s and 1970s were explicitly conceived as supranational, not national. This identity was distinguished from the sub-state nationhood.

Similar to Sovietness, Yugoslavism existed exclusively within the ideological totalitarian framework. Thus when this ideological framework began to erode, the supranational identities of Yugoslavness were discredited and could not exist outside the ethnic framework. Furthermore the cultural legacy of Yugoslavism and its significant overlap with Serbism added another factor to the reluctance of non-Serbs to identify with a Yugoslav identity. Yugoslavism was often identified with Serb hegemony over the Yugoslav state structures.

When communism began to collapse in the late 1980s, the totalitarian postulates of the communist ideology were increasingly challenged and began to lose their appeal. The erosion of the regime led to gradual weakening of the center. **With Milošević’s swift shift from communism to Serbian nationalism**, Belgrade was no longer able to function as a uniting force. The absence of a full-scale democratization and the federal structure hindered the emergence of political groups outside the ethno-cultural frame, thus enabling only ethno-national groups to emerge as vocal opposition. When the totalitarian communist ideology finally collapsed, the national movements were in a position to quickly fill in the existing gap in absence of other alternatives. The weakening of the communist ideology strengthened the religious elites in Serbia. The SOC worked hand in hand with the respective political elites. While the interpretational framework for national identity remained common descent and features, the SOC struggled to substitute the ideological gap left by the collapsed exclusive communist ideology with the exclusive ideology of Orthodoxy.

The relationship between the SOC during the existence of Yugoslavia and inter-war years is well documented.⁴¹ This relationship continued after the col-

39 Dejan Jović, “Yugoslavism and Yugoslav Communism: From Tito to Kardelj,” in Djokić, ed., *Yugoslavism*, pp. 157–181.

40 Hannes Grandits, “Dynamics of Socialist Nation-Building: The Short Lived Programme of Promoting a Yugoslav National Identity and Some Comparative Perspectives,” *Dve domovini [Two Homelands]* 28 (2008), pp. 15–28.

41 On the political role of churches during Yugoslavia see Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols. Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* [Religion and global politics] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For a newer and more comprehensive account see Klaus Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus in Jugoslawien 1945–1991: Ein serbisch-kroatischer Vergleich* [Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen 40] (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), as well as Klaus Buchenau, *Kämpfende Kirchen: Jugoslawiens religiöse Hypothek* [Erfurter Studien zur Kul-

lapse of Communism. The church was in constant dialogue with the nationalist elites and was pursuing group solidarity strategies that did not favor the preservation of the common Yugoslav state. Since the church was successful in interpreting secularization not only as a religious but also as a national problem, it was able to draw the support of the national elites, leading to the rise of what can be called religious nationalism. Secularization was thus interpreted as a danger to the national existence which can be fenced off only by adhering to a Christian-peasant culture as the general guiding principle.⁴²

Similar to the SOC the RomOC played an important role in forming the conservative and often far right discourses. The ideas of traditionally conservative currents of Romanian society, such as the *autochthonists* and *peasantists*, were replaced by far right discourses. These new discourses blended xenophobia and anti-Semitism with a nostalgic view of Christian Orthodox values as expressed within patriarchal peasant society. By taking over the Daco-Romanian discourse from the Eastern Rite Catholic Church, the RomOC further increased its legitimacy and recognition within society and by the state.⁴³ It was precisely this unique blend that enabled the Romanian Orthodox Church to position itself in such a way as to participate in Romania's nation-building efforts. An increasingly nationalistic interwar Romania drew heavily on Christian values. The League of the Archangel Michael (later called the Iron Guard), which was very influential until 1941, blended Christian and nationalist discourses. The Church clearly took sides in the conflict by promoting the exclusion of other religious groups (mainly Jews but also Eastern Rite Catholic Christians, Roman Catholics and Protestants) from the Romanian national project.⁴⁴

When the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) assumed power in Romania in 1945, nationalist thoughts—well-established among the intelligentsia—stood at odds with the new ideology. Thus, after a brief period in which the RCP leadership switched to an internationalist discourse, the Romanian variant of national communism supplanted internationalism in the early 1950s.⁴⁵

turgeschichte des orthodoxen Christentums, 2] (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2006). The role of the Orthodox Church in the Kosovo conflict is discussed in Klaus Buchenau, "Verspätete Ernüchterung: Die Serbische Orthodoxe Kirche im Kosovokonflikt 1960-1999," *Osteuropa-Institut der Freien Universität Berlin. Arbeitspapiere Geschichte und Kultur* 2 (1999).

42 Buchenau, *Orthodoxie und Katholizismus*, pp. 440-447. On the rise of "religious nationalism" in Central and Eastern Europe see also Frans Hoppenbrouwers, "Winds of Change: Religious Nationalism in a Transformation Context," *Religion, State & Society* 30:4 (2002), pp. 305-316.

43 Lavinia Stan, Lucian Turcescu, "The Romanian Orthodox Church and Post-Communist Democratisation," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52:8 (2000), p. 1468.

44 Umut Korkut, "Nationalism versus Internationalism: The Roles of Political and Cultural Elites in Interwar and Communist Romania," *Nationalities Papers* 34:2 (2006), pp. 137-138.

45 For a detailed account of the events see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* [Societies and Culture in East-Central Europe 7] (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), chapter three.

The RCP took up the nationalist discourse developed in the interwar period and creatively combined it with the communist one, forming a nationalism unprecedented in other communist states of Eastern Europe. By arguing that the nation was complementary rather than antagonistic to a communist society, the nation was reintroduced to the agenda as the sole factor deserving attention and devotion.⁴⁶ The coming to power of Ceaușescu and the worsening relations between Romania and the Soviet Union only increased such nationalist tendencies. This resulted in the regime's repression of minorities, which had the teleological constructed aim of achieving a homogenous Romanian nation built around a common language, ancestry, and Orthodoxy. Although still regarding religion as a capitalist remnant, the regime re-activated the symbiosis between the church and the state due to their promotion of a religiously homogenous national identity. The Romanian patriarch Justinian (1948–1977), who accepted the control of the Romanian state, blended Orthodox and communist views into what he called the concept of a “social apostolate.”⁴⁷ The collapse of communism in Romania did not result in an ideological vacuum. State-sponsored rhetoric had long been directed towards the category of nation. Thus, the national idea did not experience discontinuity, as was the case in the Soviet Union.

The relation of the BOC with the state elites was, however, equally supportive to the Bulgarian national cause—especially concerning its claims on Macedonia. Due to its schismatic status that lasted until 1945, the church was in a weaker position than its Orthodox peers. After the schism was lifted from the BOC by an initiative from the ROC, presumably by orders from the political leadership in Moscow, the BOC was brought under strict state control and became a docile follower of state orders.⁴⁸ After the communist regime took over in Bulgaria, the BOC lost its claims on Macedonia for good. Since the Macedonian issue was decided at the political level, the church was not allowed to perpetuate its claims on this territory actively. Nevertheless, the church continued its claims over Macedonia in a symbolic way by ordaining bishops with titles of inactive ancient sees. Similar to other communist states, the church was a natural ally to the nationalists who represented the only opposition to the communist regime. After the fall of communism, the church was further weakened. On one hand it lost trust among the population due to its collaboration with the communist government,⁴⁹ and on the other hand it was weakened by an internal schism that started in 1992 and is continuing until today. The alternative synod that split from the BOC and is much smaller

46 Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, pp. 117–121; Korkut, “Nationalism versus Internationalism,” p. 143.

47 Gvosdev, *An Examination of Church-state Relations*, pp. 221–232; Korkut, “Nationalism versus Internationalism,” p. 147; Stan, Turcescu, “The Romanian Orthodox Church,” p. 1468.

48 For details see Raikin, “Nationalism,” pp. 190–205.

49 Ramet, “Religion and Nationalism,” p. 281.

in numbers justifies its defection on moral grounds and accuses the official synod of overt collaboration with the communist regime. Today the BOC (both synods) have rested their claims on Macedonia and define their canonic territory within the border of the current Republic of Bulgaria.⁵⁰ The BOC is thus an example of an institutional change from an expansive national state paradigm towards a non-expansive national state paradigm.

THE POST-IMPERIAL CHURCHES

The main feature of the post-imperial churches is that they have been (re-) created after the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires as a result of World War I. The status of these churches and place within the Orthodox community is still disputed, due to various claims from their mother churches. Born in an era when national states were limited to fixed boundaries, their canonical claims are limited to their newly independent state borders.

Alone on the territory of former Yugoslavia there are two churches that claim autocephaly from the SOC. These are the MOC and the MaOC. Their claims are driven by the same logic: an independent state—an independent church. The most vocal has been the MaOC and the political elite of Macedonia. Disputes between the church hierarchy of the SOC and the MaOC began more than 40 years ago, when in 1967, with the support of Tito, the MaOC unilaterally declared autocephaly from the SOC, after negotiations on the issue had failed. The SOC acted promptly not only by rejecting the declaration as uncanonical and schismatic, but also by postulating that the Macedonians did not constitute a nation on their own, but were in fact “Southern Serbs.”⁵¹ Meanwhile the political elite of Macedonia and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia supported the MaOC as their autocephaly would strengthen the efforts of the Yugoslav regime in carving out a Macedonian nation. After Macedonia gained independence from Yugoslavia, the importance of having a national church was even more important than before. The repeated imprisonment of the Bishop Jovan of Ohrid—the only member of the MaOC clergy switching loyalty to the SOC—and the refusal of the Macedonian government to register any parishes of the SOC show that the issue of the MaOC is not an issue of pure belief but of national identity. This is also confirmed by the various supportive statements of the previous Macedonian presidents Boris Trajkovski and Branko Tsrvenkovski towards the MaOC.⁵²

50 Bălgarska Pravoslavna Cărkva, “Ustav na Bălgarska Pravoslavna Cărkva (BPC)—Bălgarska Patriaršija. Priet ot VI Cărkovno-naroden săbor na 11 dekembri 2008 g., v Rilskata sveta obitel,” publikuvan v *Cărkoven vestnik*, Isvănreden broj, 09.01.2009 g. Ustav na BPC (čl 3). Available from <http://bg-patriarshia.bg/index.php?file=statute.xml>.

51 Ramet, “Religion and Nationalism,” pp. 159–162.

52 Payne, “Nationalism and the Local Church,” pp. 838–839.

Since Montenegro was the last Yugoslav country to gain independence, the MOC has asserted its claims rather late in 1993. Conflicts between the SOC and the MOC are not as fierce as in the Macedonian case as both churches operate in the country. Since the country itself is rather divided between those who adhere to a Serb identity and those who see themselves as Montenegrin, state support is not exclusively for the MOC. Nevertheless, the MOC claims jurisdiction over “all those who live on the territory of the Montenegrin state as well as those living in the diaspora on the territory of other states.”⁵³

The situation in Ukraine is more complex and reflects the internal regional division in the country between the Russian speaking Ukrainians located in the east and looking favorably towards Moscow and the Ukrainian speaking Ukrainians located in the west, with cultural roots in the Habsburg monarchy. The central parts of the country around Kiev seem to mitigate both antagonisms.⁵⁴ Similar to the RomOC the ROC benefitted from the repression that the Eastern Rite Catholic church witnessed during the Soviet Union through the forced transfer of church property to it. Both the Romanian and the Soviet Party hierarchy saw in the Eastern Rite Catholic Church as an organization that was controlled by the West—the Vatican. Since the Eastern Rite Catholic Church was a carrier of Ukrainian identity, the authorities saw it as a hotbed for Ukrainian nationalism.⁵⁵ After independence the functioning of the Eastern Rite Catholic Church was restored and the church was able to re-establish its follower base mainly in the west of the country. The political changes in Ukraine were favorable for a national ideology that would demarcate the Ukrainians from the Russians. Thus the political leadership encouraged the establishment of a national church. Since this function could not be fulfilled by the Eastern Rite Catholic Church loyal to the Vatican, Leonid Kravchuk and later Viktor Yushchenko supported politically the creation of a national Orthodox Church. The UOC-KP was thus a natural ally of the political establishment aiming at distancing itself from Moscow.⁵⁶ An important role is also attributed to the

53 Crnogorska Pravoslavna Crkva, “Ustav Crnogorske Pravoslavne Crkve” (2009). Ustav CPC 2012 (čl. 1). Available from http://www.cpc.org.me/latinica/dokumenta_crkva-prikaz.php?dokument=ustav&naslovdok=UstavCrnogorskePravoslavneCrkve.

54 Evans, “Forced Miracles,” pp. 37–38. For details on the cleavages see Ivan Katchanovski, *Cleft Countries: Regional Political Divisions and Cultures in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Moldova* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2006).

55 However, the identity discourse of the ROC and the Eastern Rite Catholic Church is much more complex than described here. For details see Natalia Shlikhta, “‘Greek Catholic’ - ‘Orthodox’ - ‘Soviet’: A Symbiosis or a Conflict of Identities?” *Religion, State & Society* 32:3 (2004), pp. 261–273.

56 This was clearly reflected in the visit of Kirill, Patriarch of the ROC, to Ukraine in July 2009. For details see Lydia S. Tonoyan and Daniel P. Payne, “The Visit of Patriarch Kirill to Ukraine in 2009 and Its Significance in Ukraine’s Political and Religious Life,” *Religion, State & Society* 38:3 (2010), pp. 253–264.

personality of Filaret (Denysenko), the current head of the UAC-KP. Filaret previously held a high position in the ROC and after his defection he became an advocate of Ukrainian nationalism. Due to his controversial personality, the brief merger between the UOC-KP and the smaller Ukrainian Autocephalous Church—a church (re)-established in the late 1980s—was not successful.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Filaret was able to gain support from the political establishment. His argumentation is twofold. While in ecclesial discourses he argues that the reason for claiming autocephaly is that the movement of the Patriarchal See first to Vladimir and then to Moscow in the fourteenth century was non-canonical, thus implying by this the complete negation of the ROC history,⁵⁸ in political discourses directed to a wider audience, he plays the Ukrainian nationalist card within the paradigm—one nation, one church.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

As this study has shown, Orthodox churches can be divided into three categories according to their self-understanding. The churches of the first category—the churches of (former) empires—share an extensive view of their territory and their flock. Based on the criteria defined by Osterhammel, the EPC and the ROC qualify as churches of the first category. On the other hand, the churches of the Balkans could be described as expansive ethno-confessional churches, carving out a middle course between an empire and a national state paradigm. Unlike the RomOC and the SOC it seems that—from today's perspective—only the BOC seems to have reached the nation state paradigm. The fourth category of churches created in the post-World War I era consists of the so called “separatist” churches. These churches feature an ethnic exclusive non-expansive principle and are located within the nation state paradigm. Prominent examples of such churches are the UOC-KP, the MaOC and the MOC. Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that these categories are not stable as institutions change over time. Such institutional changes are facilitated by the discourses and influences these churches are exposed to in their states of operation.

57 Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nihil Obstat: Religion, Politics, and Social Change in East Central Europe and Russia* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 253–261; Payne, “Nationalism and the Local Church,” pp. 844–845.

58 Matsuzato, “Inter-Orthodox Relations,” p. 241.

59 Ukraïns’ka Pravoslavna Tserkva Kyïvs’kyi Patriarkhat, “Arkhitektura Iedannia,” Oleksandr Trofymliuk (director) (Kiev, 2012). [www.cerkva.info/uk/media/videos/66-doc-films/2150-video-avtokefalia.html], accessed February 14, 2013.