

Catérine Korchagin

Thesis Title:

How did the вишита сорочка evolve into a symbol of Ukrainian nationalism and resistance from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day?

---

Statement:

This research investigates the evolution of the role of the вишита сорочка, the ethnic Ukrainian embroidered shirt, from an ethnic garment to a symbol of Ukrainian nationalism. By uncovering the ways in which the вишита сорочка has been utilised to express resistance against colonisation and cultural assimilation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Soviet era, this study reveals the reasons behind the popularity of the вишиванка in modern Ukraine.

---

Quotes:

'The Soviet regime deliberately distorted and simplify Ukrainian ethnic culture. The essence of the шароварщина phenomenon was to replace substance with form. For instance, the symbolism and the history behind the embroideries of the вишита сорочка were suppressed to give place to nonsensical flower motifs that had only a decorative function'.

'To sum up, the costumes worn by the Soviet dance ensembles and the шароварщина concept were designed to present Ukrainians as a weaker nation that relied on russia for support and resources (Музиченко, 2020). For colonisers like the USSR, it was advantageous to introduce an artificial culture among the colonised nations such as Ukraine, as it resulted in blurring the country's borders, erasing its historical roots, and creating a false sense of identity'.

Музиченко, Я. (2020) 'Спотворено в СССР', *Zbruč*. Available at: <https://zbruc.eu/node/95252> (Accessed: 10 April 2023).

'The close geographical proximity to the coloniser has likely impacted Ukraine's capacity to rebuild its identity after gaining independence. Even today, the remnants of Soviet influence still persist, and Ukrainian culture is sometimes still underestimated and discredited in popular culture'.

'Over the centuries, the tradition of embroidering shirts has been passed down along with symbolic meanings. Even today, the вишиванка continues to embody the nationalist idea of preserving Ukraine's independence and national identity. Moreover, similarly to the past, embroideries still carry protective powers. And finally, the garment serves as a bridge connecting Ukrainians to their history and ancestors'.

---

Labels:

**- Object 1: Book 24,5x34**

Національний центр народної культури "Музей Івана Гончара" (2008) *Україна та українці: історико-етнографічний мистецький альбом Івана Гончара. Вибрані аркуші*. Київ: Оранта.

The *Україна та Українці* albums collection created by the Музей Івана Гончара. These albums feature 19th-century photographs of peasants from different regions of Ukraine taken by Іван Гончар. They offer an opportunity to see how people wore and combined various elements of ethnic dress. However, it's important to realise that most people wore festive dress while being photographed, and the albums do not reflect the everyday dress of peasants in the 19th century.

**- Object 2: Book 25x20**

Звиняцьківська, З. (2021) *Родинний альбом. Колекція світлин української вуличної моди ХХ сторіччя*. Київ: ArtHuss.

The *Родинний альбом* is an album that was put together using an online collection created by the Urban Media Archive. The collection consists of photographs capturing Ukrainians during the Soviet era, sourced from private archives. These pictures showcase individuals from various social backgrounds wearing street fashion.

**- Object 3: Short Embroidered Shirt**

*A women's Ukrainian embroidered ethnic shirt from Борщівський district in Тернопільська region. (ca. 19-20th centuries) [Garment]. Private collection.*

The embroidery motifs and symbols used by Ukrainian villagers in the 19th century presumably reflected their deep religiosity and close connection to nature. Whether or not they had an accurate botanical representation, floral motifs were the most prevalent in Ukrainian embroidery. For peasants, the flower represented the peak of the annual cycle as it determined the fruitfulness of the upcoming year (Селівачов, 2009: 173).

Religion, along with the connection to ancestors and the belief in magic, was another crucial aspect of peasant life. The cross symbolised the four sides of the world, fertility, femininity and Christianity (ibid: 206-209).

Селівачов, М. (2009) Лексикон української орнаментики. Київ: Задруга.

#### - Object 4: Long Embroidered Shirt

*A women's Ukrainian embroidered ethnic shirt from Гадяч city in Полтавська region. (ca. 19-20th centuries) [Garment]. Private collection.*

The ethnic dress varied widely depending on the different ethnographic regions, the season, the wearer's age, marital status, and personal taste, not to mention that the festive attire differed from the everyday dress. Furthermore, the wearer's social class had a big influence on the materials and clothes' styles.

The вишита сорочка is a core element of Ukrainian ethnic dress as it is probably one of the only pieces that remained unchanged across different contexts. A white вишита сорочка made from hemp or flax always constituted the basis for both male and female wardrobes.

The вишита сорочка was considered an underwear, therefore only the sleeves, the cuffs, the hem, and the collar were allowed to be seen in public. Consequently, only these parts of the сорочка were embroidered with various motifs.

---

#### Interview:

The Soviet regime offered incentives, such as better jobs and social status, for people who adopted a Soviet style of dress, while those who continued to wear ethnic dress were often stigmatised and marginalised. Ethnic dress became portrayed as a costume. In an interview I conducted, Геннадій Корчагін, talking about the 1970s and the 1980s, said:

I don't think it was forbidden [to wear a вишиванка], but I didn't wear it. I don't remember my parents wearing it. The Soviet society cultivated the idea that it [the вишиванка] is something for a costume party, to go on stage to dance the hopak [a Ukrainian folk dance] or sing a folk song. (...) it [the вишиванка] is something old (..) you look like a provincial [in it]. (...) I probably wouldn't wear a вишиванка back then because I felt ashamed] (Геннадій Корчагін interview, 2022).