

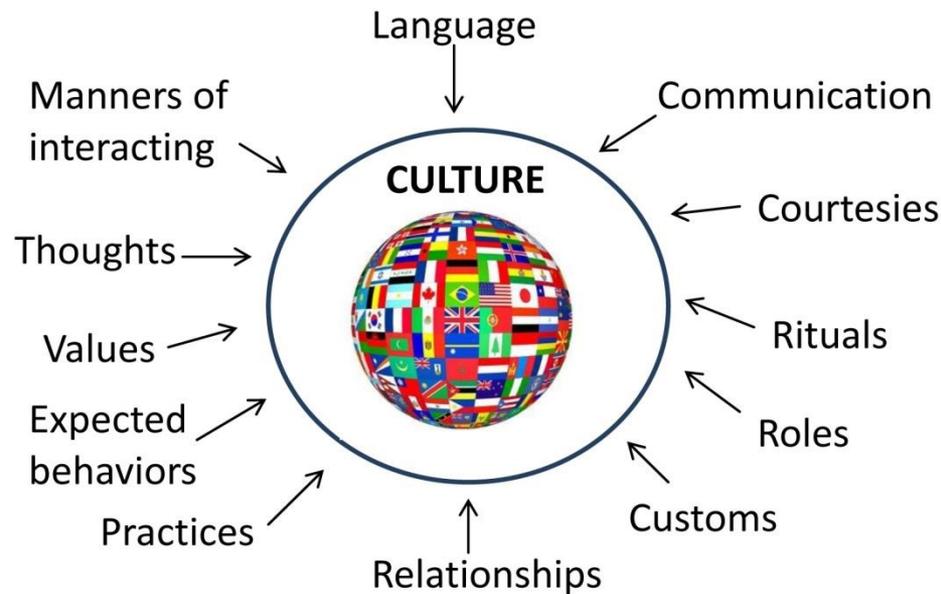
UNDERSTANDING SLAVIC CULTURE

# CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

YANA – CALIFORNIA dba SIDE BY SIDE

# What is Culture?

Culture is a system of values and norms that are shared among a group of people and that when taken together constitute a design of living.



# Statistics

According to Russian American Media (2017), there is an estimate of 1,100,000 Slavic-speaking (Russian and Ukrainian) residents in Northern California, of which about 300,000 or 27.3% located in Greater Sacramento area.



# What are the Slavic countries?

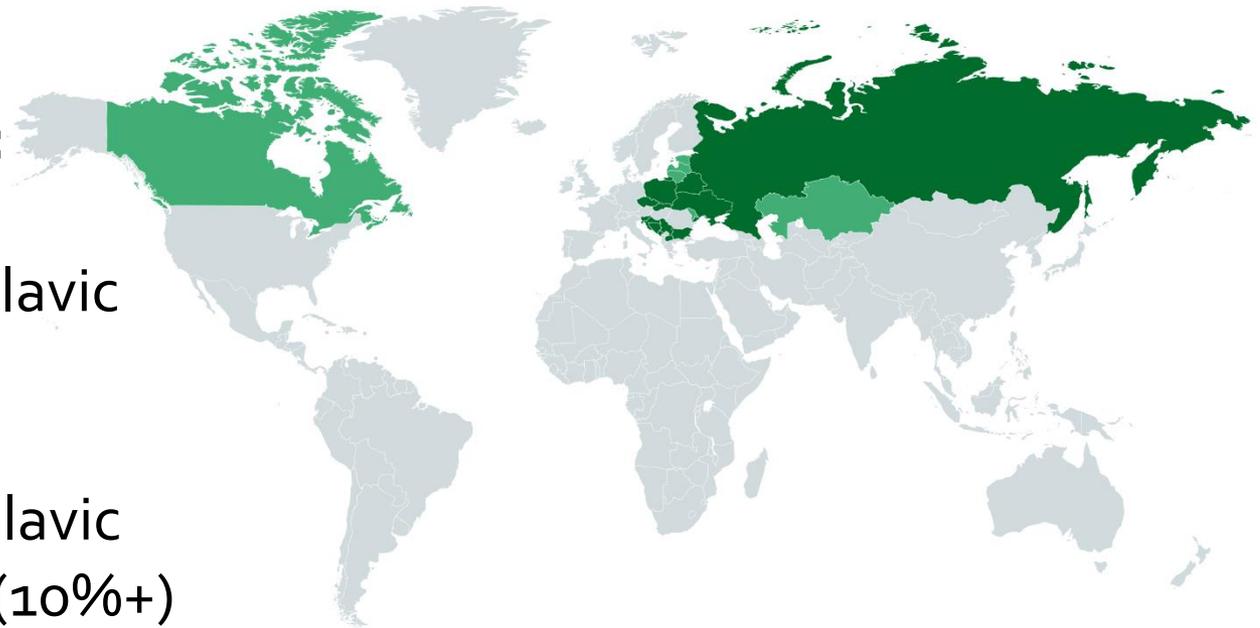
A largest ethnic and linguistic group in Europe, and in many parts of the world as well, called the Slavs.

# What are the Slavic countries?

A largest ethnic and linguistic group in Europe, and in many parts of the world as well, called the Slavs.

World Map of countries with:

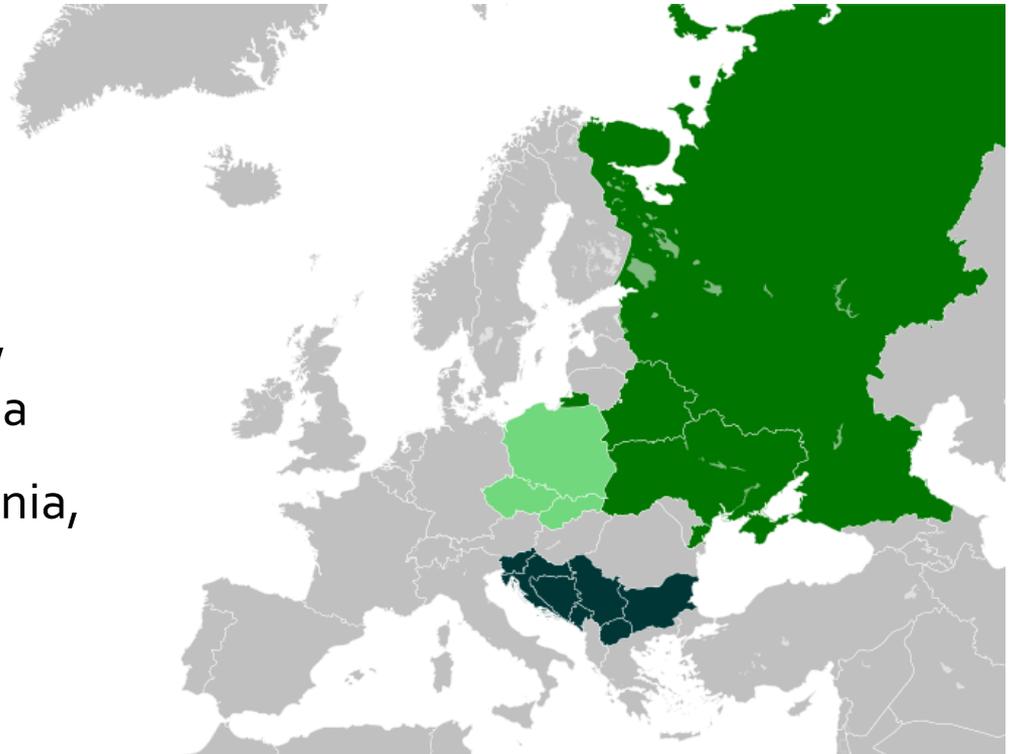
- Majority of Slavic ethnicities;
- Minority of Slavic populations (10%+)



# What are the Slavic countries?

**Three Slavic Divisions:** the Slavic countries and their main languages are generally categorized in three groups:

- East Slavic** Russia, Belarus and Ukraine
- West Slavic** Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia
- South Slavic** Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bulgaria



# Religion and Beliefs

All three groups of Slavic countries are considered the most religious people group in Europe.



Most of the Slavic people practice their religion on Sundays, some of them – on Saturdays. Other than that, the religious practice does not require any special time or accommodations during the weekdays.

# Religion and Beliefs

Eastern Slavic people maintain their integrity in a way that conforms to their inner notion of what a human being should be, with a blatant honesty and integrity seldom seen elsewhere in the world.

Above all, they have an appreciation for wholeness or complete commitment and faith, no matter what that faith might be related to.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

**Looking grumpy and not smiling**



# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Looking grumpy and not smiling

Slavic people do admittedly have a serious demeanor, at least while in public, and it is considered impolite to express strong (especially loud) emotions around strangers.

There is a rule: the smile must be a genuine reflection of a good mood and a good relationship.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Looking grumpy and not smiling

It is not common to just smile at a random person in the street or even your work colleagues for no reason. If someone you do not know is smiling at you, you can assume he is a creep, a pickpocket or he wants something from you. So you best just ignore them and look grumpy.

Of course, this all changes in private.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Looking grumpy and not smiling

Slavic people are also very blunt and will not beat around the bush; they do not tolerate small talk or niceties and much prefer to get to the point of a conversation. Except for young (Americanized) people, you will never hear Slavic people exchanging “How are you?” as they walk past each other on the street.

This question is reserved for private conversations and demands an honest answer.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Having a Specific Gender Roles



# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Having a Specific Gender Roles

Even though Slavic people are mostly pro equal rights of men and women, gender norms do exist in the homes of Slavs. Men are meant to be the leader and provider of household and women are expected to be caretakers of the home. In the modern common Slavic household dynamic, both parents usually work and it is more commonly the woman's job rather than the man's to care for the children and do the housework.

However, some families have alternative dynamics.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Having a Specific Gender Roles

Relatives usually have very close relationships and are interdependent, helping each other in times of need. Extended family members are also very involved with people's lives and the support of the household. Grandparents usually play a big part in raising children.

The elderly hold a respected position in the household.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

**Being suspicious of strangers**



# Some common traits of Slavic people

## **Being suspicious of strangers**

Being more traditional and less liberal, Slavic people value personal relationships and trust, and tend to be suspicious of strangers. They do not trust anyone they do not really know. As a result, they usually stick to people who they know very well.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Being suspicious of strangers

Eastern Slavic countries were, until recently, under communist rule. The countries were corrupt, the police, the government, the boss and everyone around you we're corrupt and you have to be corrupt as well. Or at the least, be very careful whom you trust.

So diversity and new western opinions are not that easy to accept for some people. Especially who are limited to closed Slavic communities and are not exposed to American culture.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Being suspicious of strangers

Eastern Slavic people are more likely to be cautious and conservative defenders of the status quo. Their cruel climate, harsh history, and skeptical outlook on life have caused them to value stability, security, social order, predictability, and avoiding risk.

The tried and tested is preferred over the new and unknown.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

## Hospitality and generosity in Slavic culture



# Some common traits of Slavic people

## **Hospitality and generosity in Slavic culture**

Hospitality and sharing food is a big deal in Slavic culture. It is a way of establishing communion between people. It is an act of trust. Sharing food is the most intimate act that can be performed with clothes on. It is authentic and primal. No great relationship can ever begin until food is taken from the same dish.

Eating identical organic matter creates an enduring cellular connection between people that lasts well after the food has been digested.

# Some common traits of Slavic people

## **Hospitality and generosity in Slavic culture**

Food is more than sustenance but also a necessary resource for connection, community and relationships.

It is almost an insult to refuse to consume at least water when it is offered.

# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### Keep in mind:

- If they do not smile, it does not mean they are mean, they are reserved.
- When you will gain their trust, they will open up.



# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### Keep in mind:

- Do not try to say anything in their native language.
- Be natural, speak English.
- If they are not fluent in English, ask if they want you to speak slower.
- Speak slower, if you are asked to do so.
- It is Ok to help them with English when they struggle to verbalize their thoughts.



# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### In a house:

- Try not to arrive earlier than scheduled. You are visiting a family with a special needs child. That means, they can be busy up to the very last minute taking care of very important matters. It is Ok to be late for up to 5-10 minutes. Your delay will give the family extra time to get ready.



# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### In a house:

- Knock.
- When door opens, do not rush in.
- Introduce yourself; wait for invitation to come inside the house.
- Do not say any compliments at this point; it will be considered as unnatural. Just talk business.



# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### In a house:

- Ask, if you should take your shoes off. Most of the time, you will get an invitation to remain in your shoes (get ready to take your shoes off though).
- However, the fact that you have asked, will show your respect toward the house you are about to enter.
- Wipe your shoes at the doormat; it will show your respect and will help establish a good connection.



# Visiting a House    laying out some points

In a house:



**Side note:** The majority of Slavic people treat their houses like a private castle, and keep them clean and separate from everything that is outside. That includes the dust from outside of the house.

# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### In a house:

- Once in a house, say your Hellos and greetings one more time (this time greet everyone in a room).
- At this time it is appropriate to say some compliments about the beautiful flowers on a front yard, cute dog/cat, etc. (do not compliment how house/front yard/path are clean – they should be clean). Even though compliments are appropriate, they are not necessary.



# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

In a house:



**Side note:** you may shake their hands. However, if you are wearing gloves, take your gloves off before a handshake.

# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### In a house:

- Now you can get straight to business. Be quiet for a few seconds to let the mother take lead.
- If the mother is not active/shy/confused, using your eyes find a place to sit and ask, if it is Ok to sit there or they want you to sit somewhere else.



# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### In a house:

- If you are offered a tea or a treats, you can politely refuse and thank them. You can ask for a bottle of water, that is appropriate.
- If tea is already on the table, it is Ok to take just a few sips and leave it. You do not have to finish it.
- Asking for permission to wash your hands before you start eating (if you have accepted the offer to eat some snacks) will add respect to you.



# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### In a house:

- If some decisions are required, ask if the mother needs to discuss it with her husband.



**Side note:** In some families, important decisions, including decisions regarding their kids, can be made solely by mothers. In other families, such decisions have to be made by both parents.

# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

**In a house:**

**DO NOT:**

- Talk about war, politics, religion, family values and history.
- Use "Russian"/ "Ukrainian"/ "Belarus" in your conversation. It is Ok to say "Slavic"
- Wash/ask to wash your hands before leaving. It is Ok to wash your hands before meal



# Visiting a House

## laying out some points

### Leaving a house:

- They might walk you to your car.



# UNDERSTANDING SLAVIC CULTURE

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**Q & A**