EEA

East European Affairs

1

2021

"Away from Moscow! Europe Now": The Othering of Russia in Post-Maidan Ukraine's Political Discourse

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of post-Maidan political identity construction in Ukraine, with a focus on the othering of Russia in Ukrainian political discourse throughout Petro Poroshenko's presidency. Conventional wisdom suggests that the formation of enemy images gain steady relevance during the mobilization and fighting periods of war.

Findings indicate that the characteristics of enemy image of Russia are as follows: First, the othering of Russia has been inherently linked to Ukraine's "European choice," given that in European political discourse, Russia is clearly the identifiable "other." Notably, former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has consistently strived to situate the conflict with Russia within the framework of Russia-West/EU confrontation. Second, the othering of Russia has been correlated with growing nationalism- as critical bulwarks against Russian "imperialism" and aggression in presidential discourse progress. The Ukrainian case analysis provides insight into the discursive strategies of othering in war-torn societies.

Keywords: Maidan Revolution, Ukraine, Russia, enemy image, othering.

Introduction

This article focuses on the othering of Russia, and the functions of the enemy image in post-Maidan Ukraine's identity construction since 2014. Russia's annexation of Crimea coupled with increasing of the separatist movement in eastern Ukraine have generated huge public and political backlash against Russia.

Unsurprisingly, post-Maidan Ukraine's political leadership resorted to the substantial othering of Russia, treating the latter as the greatest threat to Ukrainian sovereignty, freedom, and liberal international order (Molchanov, 2015). Escalation of the armed conflict in Donbas that plunged the Ukrainian crisis into a volatile new phase, led to further othering of Russia.

The enemy image of Russia reached the point of dehumanization by the Ukrainian political leadership and portrayal as an "evil empire," supporting and financing terrorism (Yatsenuk, 2014).

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Extensive scholarship exists on the roles and functions of enemy imagery in modern societies. While the majority of academic research has focused on the processes in which enemy images emerge, there seems to be a reductionism of the formation of enemy images during the mobilization and violent periods of war. This line of thinking presumes that enemy images gain steady relevance in situations where there is a growing political need to strengthen national integration and national identity formation (Luostarinen, 1989).

According to widely held beliefs, Ukraine's othering of Russia is linked to its "European choice," given that in European political discourse, Russia is clearly identifiable 'other' (Neumann, 2013).

This pertains to the heart of Putin's presidential standing that has led to the establishment of an ideology rooted in Russian ethnic nationalism, conservative values and the Russian Orthodox church, which adamantly oppose that of European political thought. This new ideology and increasingly anti-Western rhetoric contribute significantly to the substantial othering of Russia and portrayal as Europe's 'other' in European political thinking (Terzyan, 2021). The European Committee of the British House of Lords (2015) contend that Russia is increasingly defining itself as the EU's rival with the creation of the Eurasian Union and possibly constructing a Eurasian identity (Stefansson, 2015, pp. 20-21).

While the Ukrainian crisis provides a fertile ground for further othering of Russia, by feeding the narrative that Russia pressures Ukraine to abandon its European dream and consistently undermines the very sovereignty of the Ukrainian state (Molchanov, 2015, p. 215).

This study provides a more holistic approach by exploring the political rationale behind substantial othering of Russia with a focus on the strategies of othering in Petro Poroshenko's discourse.

It borrows insights from the landmark study of Oddo (2011) that examines how 'Us' and 'Them' emerge as meaningful categories through the differential deployment of highly moralized lexical resources – especially highly moralized material processes and nominalizations (Oddo, 2011, p. 288). It identifies the discursive construal of an Us/Them binary as the principal legitimation technique that rhetors use to juxtapose 'Our' overwhelmingly positive image with 'Their' rather negative image. Oddo (2011) contends that polarizing lexical resources constitute 'Us' and 'Them' as superordinate thematic categories that covertly legitimate war (Oddo, 2011, p.287). However, this study suggests that, the derivative causes

of this 'Us' versus 'Them' polarization in post-Maidan Ukrainian discourse stem from Ukrainian leadership's reaction to Russia's blatant defiance of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

This article addresses the following research questions: 1. What are the main features of the enemy image of Russia? 2.What are the core functions of the enemy image of Russia in post-Maidan Ukraine's identity construction and nation-building?

This study relies on observations from political speeches, newspaper articles, official documents and interviews which provide a body of discourse. It places distinct attention on major political speeches of Petro Poroshenko, pertaining to his conceptions of self-other dichotomies and the prevailing characteristics of the enemy images of Russia.

The Role and Functions of the Enemy Image and the Relevance of the Ukrainian Case

Constructivist and poststructuralist-driven studies presume that the portrayal of enemy images is an integral part of identity construction, and an actor's sense of self is unclear and incomplete until the otherness is defined (Tamaki, 2010, p. 29). Thus, the enemy images become crucial criteria for defining the self, as well as securing the national boundaries by the representation of danger (Campbell, 1998, p. 11). In a similar fashion, Bo Petersson (2006) notes that negative stereotypes and enemy images are highly instrumental in upholding the borderlines that help collective of people to establish and define their group identities (Petersson, 2006, p. 31).

Some works specifically look at the various social and political functions that enemy images may fulfill. Middens notes that 'the threat of enemies justifies actions that might otherwise be unacceptable or illegal… Enemies serve as a focus for aggression and as a means of diverting attention from complex and pressing internal problems or domestic conflicts' (Middens, 1990).

Overall, one of the most frequently observed functions of the enemy images is the potential to mobilize for or against a particular idea or a specific group. Indeed, the mobilizing power of the exceedingly dangerous enemies and ensuing acute threats would potentially have some legitimizing and justifying effects on governments' even most disputed and unpopular policies.

The "rhetoric of *ins*ecurity" suggested by Cambell (1998) seems to accurately capture the basic functions of the enemy images. According to this rhetoric, the state policies are legitimized through the attempt to instill notions of insecurity (Campbell, 1998).

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To trigger the emotions of fear, the enemy must be portrayed as barbaric, cruel, uncivilized, immoral, treacherous, and threatening. In effect, enemy images and related stereotypes are characterized by the claim that the enemy has aggressive and evil intentions and is led by a centralized and monolithic leadership that would be capable of carrying out intricate conspiracies (Hermann, 2003).

The Ukrainian case is significant for several reasons. Ukraine's choice for Europe underlying the Maidan Revolution provoked Russia into "punishing" its disobedience. This took the form of Russia's occupation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbas. As a result, Ukraine has endured all the suffering and the severe consequences that a hybrid war would cause. By the end of 2015, at least 9,000 people had been killed and more than 20,000 injured in the conflict in eastern Ukraine (Freedom House, 2016). The fighting also displaced more than two million people, and the government has struggled to meet the humanitarian needs of those displaced within Ukraine. The 3.5 million people who live in the occupied Donbas territories are effectively dependent on Russia, while various pro-Russian militias and organized crime groups have tended to seize or loot key economic assets (Freedom House, 2016).

Expectedly, Russian coercive policies have inspired huge anti-Russian criticism across Ukraine and led to its treatment as the biggest enemy of the nation (Terzyan, 2021).

The enemy image of Russia has become crucial criteria for defining post-Maidan Ukraine's identity. The former Ukrainian President Poroshenko would treat the external threat as an impetus to the contemporary Ukrainian political nation- building based on civic patriotism. "Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking citizens as well as the citizens speaking other languages… Ukrainians, ethnic Russians, Crimean Tatars, and other ethnic groups firmly uphold the position of Ukrainian patriotism. Shoulder to shoulder defend our state arms in hand" (Poroshenko, 2016).

In Ukrainian political discourse, Russia has been regarded as irremediably aggressive, inherently imperial, inhuman that poses biggest threats to the liberal international order (Molchanov, 2015).

Such a rhetoric comes down to the development of an Us/Them mindset that involves the semantic macro-strategies of positive Self-presentation and negative Other presentation (Van Dijk, 1993, 1998). In call-to-arms speeches, this dualistic perspective poses 'Us,' the essentially good and innocent protagonists, against 'Them,' the thoroughly evil aggressors

ready to attack. The landmark study of Oddo (2011) provides valuable insights into the Us/Them polarization as the key legitimation strategy in call-to-arms discourse. Besides, he focuses on three other legitimation techniques, such as (1) legitimation by reference to values; (2) legitimation by reference to temporality; and (3) legitimation by reference to group membership demarcation (Oddo, 2011).

This goes into juxtaposing Our actions and values from Their actions and values, as well as by using the past and future to legitimate actions in the present. Furthermore, it delves into the ways that rhetors demarcate who belongs to Us and Them (Oddo, 2011.)

Building on these insights, this study examines the othering of Russia through temporal proximity, moral evaluation of the enemy as well as through Poroshenko's efforts at expanding and delimiting 'US' through 'clash of civilization' narrative.

The Origins of Othering: Us and Them in The Past and Future

The Ukrainian leadership has made extensive use of the *temporal proximity* as a kind of *legitimation* technique to distance 'US' from 'Them'. This involves construing the impact of past events in such a way that they seem to affect the current situation (Oddo, 2011).

Notably, the former Ukrainian President Poroshenko tended to attribute Russian Empire's and Soviet Union's images to modern Russia and treat it as irremediably imperialistic and coercive, always trying to invade. This comes down to treating Ukraine-Russia relations as those between a victim and a predator, in which Russia has invariably strived to destroy the Ukrainian state. Thus, the "ongoing aggression against us is a continuation of the same policy to destroy Ukraine with other methods" (Poroshenko, 2017).

By appealing to the enemy images of Russia, the Ukrainian leadership would seek to assert Ukraine's "victimhood" in the face of Russian devastating policies that would similarly affect other neighboring 'victims'. "If there are not many Finns who still remember Russian aggression, there are many Lithuanians who still mourn their loved ones lost in the fight for their independence against the Kremlin. And I am sure that the majority of Bulgarians still remember the realities of socialism and would never go back to the Moscow orbit again. Today Ukraine has to fight for its independence and its freedom. We must defend our land" (Poroshenko, 2015).

Poroshenko would frequently exemplify Holodomor as a vivid manifestation of what crucibles and ordeals Ukraine was forced to pass through at the hands of Imperial Russia. "We have to tell the whole world that we will not forget the crimes of Holodomor-genocide and its perpetrators; we will not betray the ideals of the Revolution of Dignity (Poroshenko,

2015). Moreover, he compared Holodomor to Holocaust and even contended that "Not recognizing the Holodomor is as immoral as denying the Holocaust" (Radio Liberty, 2017). Meanwhile, the genocide predator was not moral enough "to recognize the famine that killed millions of people in Ukraine under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin as genocide…or at least repent for it" (Radio Liberty, 2017).

The self-portrayal of a victim at the hands of irremediably imperial Russia, would be followed by the emphasis on the necessity of "breaking all the fetters that connect us with the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. To make independence irreversible, make Ukraine great and strong, without any prospect of returning to the Russian influence zone" (Poroshenko, 2018).

This led the Ukrainian leadership to bring up the issue of country's spiritual independence. Poroshenko's speech delivered on December 15, 2018, when the results of the Unification Synod (council) of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were announced is remarkable: *"Today is December 15. I ask everyone who is watching us now: in Ukraine, all over the world – remember very well. This day will enter or has already entered the history of Ukraine as a sacred day, the day of the creation of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The day of the final gaining of Ukrainian independence from Russia. And Ukraine will no longer drink, as Taras Shevchenko said, "Moscow's poison from the Moscow's bowl"* (Poroshenko, 2018 b).

He went as far as to blame the Russian Orthodox Church for its collusion with Putin: "What is this Church? This is a Church without Putin. What is this Church? This is a Church without Kirill. What is this Church? This is a Church without prayer for the Russian authorities and the Russian army. Because the Russian authorities and The Russian Army kill Ukrainians. But this is a Church with God. This Church is with Ukraine" (CNS News, 2018).

Furthermore, Poroshenko would use the following narratives to connote departure from Russian spiritual influence and culture: "Farewell, unwashed Russia," "Farewell to you, our tender Misha, go back home to your wood of fairy tales," "Russian comrade, don't mess with Ukraine," "Away from Moscow! Europe now!" (Poroshenko, 2018b).

Essentially, by employing opposing border – narratives between 'Us' and 'Them', the Ukrainian leadership has sought to reinforce 'Ukrainianness' of the Ukrainians and irreversibly distance it from 'Russianness' (Nedozhogina, 2019).

Delimiting and Expanding Us: Othering through "Clash of Civilization" Narrative

Post-Maidan Ukrainian leadership consistently strived to position Russian aggression against Ukraine in the framework of Russia-West/EU confrontation.

Remarkably, Poroshenko would make extensive use of the "clash of civilizations" narrative to emphasize the major gaps between European, democratic Ukraine and non-democratic Russia. This would often come down to the claims that Russia poses acute threats to liberal democracies by rolling back democracy around the world and bringing down democratic governments in its neighborhood and beyond. Such claims are not novel. The conventional logic posits that the Kremlin has a strong interest in ensuring that regional and global democratic trends do not affect its hold over the Russian political system and that the legitimacy of democracy promotion and regime change are subverted (Roberts and Ziemer, 2018). Ukrainian leadership would go as far as to treat Russia as the biggest threat to liberal democracy and European system of values. Poroshenko particularly noted that "the aggression against Ukraine has opened a Pandora's Box for the international security" (Poroshenko, 2015a).

Thus, the European Union and the United Stated had a critical mission of liberating Ukraine and standing up to Russian aggression. As was foreseeable, Ukrainian leadership would frequently call for the consolidation of democratic nations as "Democracies must support each other, they must show solidarity in the face of aggression and adversity. Otherwise they will be eliminated one by one" (Los Angeles Times, 2014). It follows that "Russia's hybrid war poses a direct threat to a European community built on common values. The initiators of this conflict cynically believe that Europe cannot and will not act as one, refusing to stand up for its values in the face of a direct challenge... if Europe stands together with Ukraine, Europe is invincible… if Europe stands together with Ukraine on the defense of freedom, dignity, democracy and life without fear, then the future of Europe will be safe and bright" (Poroshenko, 2015b).

Similarly, Poroshenko would contend that "Ukraine's fight with Russia is 'America's war too '" (Los Angeles Times, 2014). Framing incursions into Ukrainian territory by Russia as "one of the worst setbacks for the cause of democracy in the world in years" Poroshenko would ask for additional political and logistical help, and for the United States to give his country a special non-allied partner status in NATO (Los Angeles Times, 2014).

Overall, Ukrainian discourse has tended to regard Russia as the biggest impediment to Ukraine's approximation towards the EU and NATO (Kyivpost, 2018). In Poroshenko's

words, Ukraine's accession into the EU and NATO would lead to significant geopolitical breakthroughs by shifting Ukraine from a part of the post-Cold war buffer zone to a full-fledged member of the European family of democracies: "For centuries Ukraine was preferred to stay in a grey or rather buffer zone, to maintain the fragile post-Cold war balance. I may give you a bit of a shock by assuming that one day a Ukraine that is no longer a part of the buffer zone but a full-fledged EU member, will push Russia to undergo the democratic and structural economic changes and gravitate towards the Western world… While kept in a buffer zone, Ukraine appears to provoke Russia to maintain its internal political status-quo and confront the European values" (Poroshenko, 2015b).

It follows that it was in the EU's and NATO's best interest to accelerate Ukraine's membership as a significant milestone in EU/West – Russia confrontation.

Moral Evaluation and Dehumanization of the Enemy. Our Patriotism Vs. Their Imperialism

Images of a unit's culture as more or less sophisticated, democratic, and advanced versus crude, nondemocratic, and backward are a basic underlying cognitive component that is central to foreign policy decision-making. John Owen contends that perceptions of another state's intentions as hostile or friendly may derive from prior images of the state's culture as liberal and democratic or illiberal and nondemocratic (Hermann, 2003, p. 288).

Fundamentally, this has much to do with the moral judgement of 'Them' and juxtaposition with 'US' - i.e., positive Self-presentation and negative Other-presentation.

Post-Maidan Ukraine's political discourse has depicted Russia as morally inferior. Overall, Russia has been treated as inherently aggressive, cruel and irremediably imperial with blatant defiance for human rights and Ukraine's sovereignty (Molchanov, 2015, pp. 5-11). Predictably, the aforementioned "inhuman" Russia would often be blamed for many atrocities, including "turning Ukraine children into orphans, internally displacing over 1.5 million people and torturing patriots in prisons" (Poroshenko, 2018c).

In general, the following words have been used to describe 'US': free, democratic, European, independent, peaceful, peace-loving, humanitarian. While, 'Them,' on the other hand, has been described as: Imperial, dictatorship, terrorist, aggressor, inhuman, non-democratic, ruthless.

To quote Poroshenko, the "Imperialistic mindset" of former Soviet Russia, prompted Russia to commit the "most cynical acts of treachery in the modern era." Yet, "We will never obey or bend to the aggressor…We are ready to fight. But we are a people of peace" (Los Angeles Times, 2014).

Table 1. "US" against "Them" In Ukrainian discourse from 2014 to 2019.

US: self-representation	THEM: the enemy image of Russia
Democratic; European	Imperial, dictatorship
Peaceful, Peace-loving	Aggressor, Terrorist
Humanitarian	Inhuman, Ruthless

In sum, the post-Maidan Ukrainian leadership has made extensive use of moral evaluations to distinguish their 'dictatorial', 'inhuman' and 'aggressive' nature from our 'democratic', 'peaceful' and 'moral' one.

This vilification facilitated the portrayal of the enemy as the biggest threat to 'our' values and strategies have been thus justified as a necessary and rational solution to the scope and severity of the enemy's threat. This came down to contrasting "our patriotism" against "their imperialism." Such moral evaluations illustrate how the "complex discursive accomplishment" of moral exclusion emerges within presidential rhetoric to frame the relations with the enemy and legitimizing certain actions (Pilecki, et. al, 2014).

Poroshenko would frequently frame nationalism and patriotism as a critical bulwark against the Russian imperialism and aggression: "There have been many years of tragic dependence on the empire …but now our generation is going to break this vicious circle… this connection with Russia. We are moving in our own direction. And the nation is now united by patriotism" (Poroshenko, 2018a).

It follows that unity and patriotism have been deemed essential to stand up to Russia and restore Ukraine's territorial integrity: "The key to our victory is unwavering unity of the Ukrainian nation. These words are not pathos. These words are objective necessity, an imperative, without which we cannot survive. Restoration of Ukraine has already begun. It is an irresistible process of purification of our lives, formation of renewed state, emergence of new people - patriots of Ukraine, heroes who stopped the attack of Empire with their feats," Petro Poroshenko emphasized (MFA, 2015).

Notably, along with "spiritual independence," the Ukrainian President would place a great deal of emphasis on the Ukrainian language "as a component of the strength and success of the Ukrainian people and key to the unity" (Opinion, 2019).

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Kulyk (2014) notes that Russian aggressiveness further contributed to the rise of inclusivity of Ukrainian nationalism, which now embraces many Russian and Russian-speaking citizens (Kulyk, 2014). Being alienated from Russia as a state and even as a people by Russia's aggressive politics, these citizens nevertheless do not exhibit a similar alienation from the Russian language. Hence the new border between Ukrainians and Russians is political rather than linguistic (Kulyk, 2014). Comprehensively, the growing emphasis on the Ukrainian language, patriotic nature, and sense of unity penetrates into a new identity construction which reinforces the 'Ukrainianness' of the nation.

Conclusions

By examining the case of war-torn post-Maidan Ukraine, this paper contributes to existing literature on the role of the enemy images in post-revolution nation-building and identity construction.

Based on the previous discussion, there are five main conclusive observations to make regarding the role of "the Other" in post-Maidan Ukraine's nation- building.

First, and in terms of othering strategies, Ukrainian leadership has made extensive use of the temporal proximation as a kind of legitimation technique to distance 'US' from 'Them.' This has involved construing the impact of past events in such a way that they seem to affect the current situation. Notably, post-Maidan Ukrainian leadership attributed the Russian Empire's and Soviet Union's images to modern Russia and treated it as irremediably imperialistic, coercive, and always trying to invade.

Second, the othering of Russia has been characterized by the moral evaluations of "the Other" and its juxtaposition with US- i.e., positive Self-presentation and negative Other-presentation. There has been a tendency for the enemy to be portrayed as morally inferior in Poroshenko's discourse. More generally, the following words have been used to describe US: free, democratic, European, independent, peace-loving. Meanwhile, the adjectives used in describing Them are as follows: Imperial, dictatorship, aggressor, inhuman, aggressor, non-democratic, ruthless.

The third observation relates to the Ukrainian leadership's efforts at expanding and delimiting 'US'. More specifically, the Russian aggression against the country has been put in the framework of broader Russia-West/EU confrontation. Thus, there has been a heightened emphasis on the "clash of civilizations" narrative and a tendency to frame the

Russian-Ukrainian confrontation as a demonstration of the antagonism between democratic, European Ukraine and non-democratic, non-European Russia. Such claims would often come down to the assertion that Russia poses acute threats to liberal democracies by bringing down democratic governments and producing autocracies in its neighborhood and beyond. Not surprisingly, the Ukrainian leadership would frequently call for the consolidation of democratic nations as a critical measure to stand up to the Russian crackdown on liberal international order.

Fourth, in terms functions of enemy imagery, the othering of Russia has been positively correlated with a mounting emphasis on nationalism in Poroshenko's discourse. He would frequently frame nationalism and patriotism as a critical bulwark against Russian imperialism and aggression. Unity and patriotism are essential aspects to stand up to Russia and restore Ukraine's territorial integrity. As could be expected, along with "spiritual independence" i.e., cutting ties to Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian leadership stressed Ukrainian language, as a component of the strength and success of the Ukrainian people and key component of unity. Overall, the growing emphasis on the Ukrainian language, patriotism and unity compiles a new identity construction aimed at reinforcing the 'Ukrainianness' of the nation and distancing it from 'Russianness.'

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