

De-humanizing the Other: Retrograde, Soviet Donbas as an anti-hero of progressive Euromaidan Ukraine in the discourse of Ukrainian political elites and media

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Based on analysis of articles, blogs, comments in the social media, this paper argues that in spite of many honest attempts to understand what Donbas identity is, the representation of Donbas in the discourse by “democratic”, pro-Western Ukrainian elites and media often focuses on depicting Donbas as a “depressive” region with a retrograde Soviet mentality. Such pejorative stereotyping has existed since the early 1990s, but intensified in the political crisis of 2004, and particularly in 2013, during “Euromaidan revolution”. Donbas is seen as the antipode of Euromaidan Ukraine: retrograde, dark, paternalistic, pro-Russian, while Euro-Ukraine is modern, bright, free, and democratic. The snobbish-condescending cliché of Donbas as a land of lowbrow lumpen-proletariat, Homo Sovieticus, who strive for a strong ruler and cheap food and drinks and do not care about history, language, and culture, dehumanizes Donbas residents, transforms them into slaves that need to be “civilized” by the “democratic” Ukraine no matter the cost. The discourse of current Ukrainian political and media circles regarding Donbas follows the logic of the “civilizational” mission of European colonialism which cost millions of lives to those who “enlightened” Europeans wanted to civilize against their own will. Ukrainian colonizers refused to negotiate with Donbas that articulated its own grievances in response to Euromaidan Ukraine which was perceived by Donbas as violent and anti-Russian. As long as Ukrainian political and intellectual elite refuse to recognize Donetsk and Lugansk residents as human being with views and values, different from their own, there will be no peace in Ukraine.

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian independence in 1991 Ukrainian elites set course to the integration with Europe. There was only one civilizational way for a country that wanted to get rid of its Soviet “totalitarian” past – a European democracy with its individual freedom, social security net, and market economy. According to the foundational myth of Ukrainian nationalist historians, the Ukrainian nation carried out a national-liberation fight from the Russian, and then Soviet occupation, for over 350 years (since signing in 1654 in Pereyaslav of the treaty of unification of Ukraine with Russia by hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky and emissaries of the Russian tsar Alexis - <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/451403/Pereyaslav-Agreement>). Finally, in 1991 Ukraine was free. In the referendum of December 1, 1991 90.3% of Ukrainians said “yes” to an independent Ukraine. In Donetsk region, where 76.73% of voting population participated in the referendum, 83.9% voted in favor of the independence. In Lugansk oblast, where over 80.65% voters came to the precincts, 83.86% supported an independent Ukraine (<https://translate.google.ca/?hl=en&tab=wT&authuser=0#en/ru/precinct>).

These are rather surprising results for a region where the large majority of the population speak Russian and where the Ukrainian nationalism and culture have always been marginal. However, it is surprising only at a first glance. One needs to remember the massive miners' strikes in 1989-1991 to understand Donbas' support of the Ukrainian independence.

By the end of perestroika the socio-economical situation in Donbas was rapidly deteriorating. The investments in the infrastructure of the coal-producing complex were scarce. The depreciation of fixed assets in the coal industry reached 44%, while in the ferrous metallurgy this figure was 75%. The coal production fell drastically, from 181.3 million tons in 1975 it went down to 170 in 1987. In 1989 the whole Ukraine produced 170 million tons of coal. The market prices rose sharply, while the availability of food and goods was limited. By 1990 the majority (over 60%) of the population in miners' cities and towns of Donetsk region became deeply disillusioned with the results of perestroika. People lost trust in the party's leadership of the Soviet Union and of the Ukrainian SSR and in their ability to lead the country out of economic and political disarray (Adamovych, p. 10).

The old system of Soviet values was discredited, leaving many residents of Donbas confused and disappointed. Because of the decline of industrial production the prestige of the worker's trades also fell (ibid). It was another powerful blow to the collective identity of Donbas people as representatives of an industrial culture, as qualifies them a Lugansk philosopher Vasiliy Popov (<http://www.ostro.org/lugansk/politics/articles/91743/>). According to him, in the hierarchy of the industrial professions, the highest position is occupied by the miner, a master of Earth entrails, lord of the underworld. But in the current Ukraine the master was degraded to an outcast, a loser, a primitive digger pottering about in a *kopanka*¹ (Popov V, quoted in Chernysh, Malanchuk, 2007: p. 77). Although the last observation was made in regards to Donbas in early 2000, it holds true for Ukraine of the times of perestroika. Disillusioned by a rapid deterioration of the economic situation and the incapability of the Soviet leadership, many in Donbas voted for the independence of Ukraine putting hope in a new national Ukrainian government.

In 1989-1991, because of the massive and spontaneous strikes of miners Donbas was almost as anti-communist as Lviv region was. Strikers rejected the Communist party, dissolving party cells within mines and factories, and putting pressure on the party committees to leave enterprises. The real power in most coal mines was in the hands of the workers' councils. Membership in the party was dwindling. In several instances this led even to the closure of party organizations (Adamovych, p. 13-14).

¹ *Kopanka* is a small open-pit or an underground mine, from which a miner extracts coal illegally, risking his life in the absence of any security measures, using rudimentary instruments such as a shovel and a wheelbarrow or a trough. *Kopanky* are located in areas where the industrial production of coal was stopped, but some coal banks remain, usually close to the surface. The extraction of coal from *kopanky* became highly lucrative in mid-1990s. The black market "businessmen", or criminal groups, took *kopanky* coal extraction under their control, bribing police and prosecutors to cover them. They would buy the extracted coal and send them by trainloads to consumers. The *kopanky* coal cannot be carbonized, so it is used for heating and as a fuel for electric power stations (<http://miningwiki.ru/wiki/%D0%9A%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%B0>).

However, at the beginning miners did not formulate any political demands. They were preoccupied with economic issues – reduction of management chain, granting of full economic and legal autonomy to mines, raise of salaries, increase of vacation, gasification and providing of running water to miners’ towns (ibid). This focusing on economic issues served as a basis of a wide-spread stereotype about Donetsk people as persons lacking spirituality, interested only in material values – good, food, and drinks. Ephemeral questions of history, language, culture, were of no interest to lowbrow proletarians of Donbas (Rasevych, 2014). A vivid and visual embodiment of this stereotype were videos of a Donetsk miner saying: “I do not care, how a kielbasa will be called – *kovbasa* or *kolbasa*, the only thing that I care is that I have it” (ibid).

Under the influence of national-democratic political forces, such as Rukh and Helsinki group, who quickly realized that miners are powerful allies in weakening the Communist leadership of the Soviet Union and went to Donbas to join the strikes, miners’ demands became political. As mentioned before, they hoped that authorities of a new, independent Ukraine would be more flexible and open to their demands. They had reasons to think so – in early 1991, as a result of negotiations between the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR and the Regional Union of strike committees of Donbas, the Council agreed to raise the price of coal, to subsidize the development of miners’ towns and cities, to invest in modernization of the equipment, to increase state contracts for coal, to settle the payment of pensions, and to transfer the coal industry under the republic’s authority (Adamovych, p. 15).

Unlike the Council of Ministers of Ukraine, the Soviet Union government refused to engage into negotiations with miners’ strike committees. Such a non-constructive position contributed to miners’ support of Ukrainian statehood. On February 18, 1991 the Regional Union of strike committees of Donbas declared that they will stop delivering coal and will begin a massive strike on March 1. National-democrat political forces joined the movement. In mid-April miners marched to Kyiv. On a mass rally in Kyiv on April 16, they voiced political demands: sovereignty of the Ukrainian state, nationalization of the assets of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, removal of party cells and committees from factories and offices, creation of Ukrainian currency and of a national army (ibid).

Donbas miners’ support of the Ukrainian independence played an important role in the dismantlement of the Soviet Union and emergence of Ukraine as a sovereign state. However, the disintegration of Soviet economy led to a prolonged and profound economic crisis. The political elite of the independent Ukraine, instead of reforming a centralized system of economic management and modernizing industry, engaged in reckless privatization for their own profit. Many in Donbas became disappointed in the Ukrainian independence, and started looking back, regretting the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This Soviet nostalgia manifested itself during elections: for instance, in 1994 parliamentary elections Donetsk and Lugansk regions voted in their majority for the Communist Party of Ukraine candidates – [24 out of 48 MPs in Donetsk and 14 out of 23 in Lugansk region](#) . The same pattern repeated itself in the [elections of 1998](#) . In the parliamentary elections of 2002 Donetsk region voted for the pro-government coalition “*For*

United Ukraine, which included the Party of Regions². In the city of Donetsk and in Lugansk and Lugansk region the majority of votes went to the Communist party of Ukraine. In 2006, 2007, and 2012 elections to the Verkhovna Rada [Donbas voted for the Party of Regions](#). In the last parliamentary elections of 2014, after the dissolution of the Party of Regions, which discredited itself completely in the Euromaidan protests, Donetsk and Lugansk regions voted for the Opposition Block, created by the former members of the Party of Regions³.

Why do Donetsk and Lugansk vote for these parties? Because they have a certain identity, which, as Halyna Dychkovska (a Ukrainian philosopher a professor of the Vasyl Stefanyk University of Ivano-Frankivsk) stated, *“lies in the system of coordinates “Soviet Power”, “Soviet Union”, “Russia”, ‘Russian Orthodoxy”, “Party of Putin’s politics”. This phenomenon is not only political; it is a world view that sees but one way to preserve itself – by identifying itself with Russia”* (2007, p. 60). These reference points have not changed since the early days of Ukrainian independence.

I will cite two studies as a proof of the stability of Donbas identity through the tumultuous years of political change in Ukraine. After 2004 Orange revolution, which revealed a deep crisis of Ukrainian political elites and population, split between Europe and Russia, the Ukrainian intellectuals realized the necessity to study more in depth the regional division in Ukraine and find ways to overcome it. Researchers of Lugansk National Pedagogical University together with Lviv Polytechnic School and Drohobych State Pedagogical University conducted a sociological study in order to determine identities of two regions which came to embody two different civilization projects for Ukraine: Halychyna and Donbas. The results of this large, multi-aspect research were published in 2007 in a book *Ukraine: images of regions and interregional relations*. The surveys were conducted in Lugansk, Stakhanov and villages of Lugansk region, on one side, and in Lviv, Drohobych, and villages of Lviv region, on another. As part of the survey respondents were asked questions, some of which confirmed a commonplace knowledge about the regional division of Ukraine.

A similar study was conducted in May-July of 2014 in Donbas – cities of Donetsk and Lugansk, several small cities, and villages, and in Halychyna: cities of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk, several small cities and villages of these two regions. The study was carried out by the Lugansk National University of Taras Shevchenko, Donetsk State University of Management, Prykarpatskyi National University of Vasyl Stefanyk (Ivano-Frankivsk), Lviv Polytechnic School and Drohobych State Pedagogical University with the support of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian studies (Edmonton). The same questions were asked respondents. I fused these two surveys in one table. In the case of the 2014 study I was able to find only combined data for two regions, without breakdown in urban and rural population, as in

² It was created in 1997 by South-Eastern Ukrainian political and business elite under the presidency of Volodymyr Rybak. Although members of the party had diverging ideological outlooks, they were united in the claim that they defend and uphold rights of ethnic Russians and Russian speaking Ukrainians in Ukraine.

³ Elections were held in the part of territories of Donbas, controlled by Ukrainian authorities – roughly two thirds of the administrative regions of Donetsk and Lugansk. The rest of the territory is controlled by the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic and Lugansk People’s Republic.

the case of the 2007 study (Kononov, 2014). A simple comparison of these data show the persistence of distinctive regional identity of Donbas.

Question: *Which of the following statements on the future development of our country you agree with?*

		2007						2014	
Answers	Luga nsk N=36 3	Lviv N=375	Stakh anov N=30 0	Droh obyc h N=2 98	Lugansk villages N=100	Lviv villages N=100	Donbas	Halyc hyna	
1.	Ukraine is, above all, a state for Ukrainians, which should have some privileges in their own country. Other ethnic groups should agree with this.	35.8	58.8	40.3	70.7	30.00	69.1	17.8	63.5
2.	Ukraine is a country for all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity. None of ethnic groups should have privileges in our country.	65.3	37.5	57.7	41.0	73.0	30.9	62.9	43.2
3.	One principle should be enforced in Ukraine: "One nation, one language, one church"	22.6	55.5	16.1	53.8	26.0	57.7	8.1	48.5
4.	Ukraine should develop as a multicultural, multilingual, and multi-confession state	72.9	35.3	68.5	29.3	73.0	38.1	71.7	44.8
5.	For Ukraine's good, most of non-Ukrainian population should leave the country	17.6	33.6	17.4	21.4	16.0	33.0	6.2	22.3
6.	For Ukraine's good, representatives of various nations should live in the country	61.7	27.2	57.4	23.4	66.0	29.9	53.3	22.9
7.	Ukraine should abandon the cultural heritage of tsarist Russia and of the USSR and develop its own spirituality	20.7	42.9	10.7	41.4	15.0	56.7	10.5	53.8

8.	Ukraine should preserve all that is valuable from the tsarist Russia and the USSR and to incorporate it into its own spiritual traditions	63.1	21.1	64.4	11.7	80.0	21.6	61.3	9.7
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These data clearly show that the majority of the population in Donbas and in Halychyna favors diverging projects of the Ukrainian nationhood. In Donbas' opinion, Ukrainian nation is a nation of common citizenship, a political nation. In this common citizenship the ethnicity is a private business of every citizen. Ukraine is a multiethnic and multicultural state, in which Ukrainian ethnics and Ukrainian culture should not have privileges over other cultures and ethnicities. The majority of people in Halychyna see Ukraine as an ethnic nationhood, in which the basis of all social loyalties is loyalty to Ukrainian ethnicity and culture (Kononov, 2007: p. 213). What these data also bring out, is the desire of Donbas to preserve the good part of tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union legacy and incorporate it in the Ukrainian political nationhood project.

In a 2006 research project “Donetsk- Lviv: sociocultural identities and practices”, conducted jointly by a DIATS company from Donetsk and the Laboratory of social research of the Centre of support for private initiative from Lviv, the inhabitants of Donetsk, when asked, how they see an ideal Ukraine, gave a following answer: a state which provides a strong social protection for its citizens (38%) and a stable state without conflicts (33%), a powerful state that occupies a leading position in the world (19%), and a democratic state that does not impinge on its citizens' rights (6%) – Vakubova, p. 33.

What holidays do Donbas residents celebrate?

Holidays	Donetsk	Lviv
March 8, International Women's day	60%	32%
Victory Day (May 9)	57%	4%
February 23, Day of the Defender of the Homeland	37%	10%
May 1, Day of International Solidarity of Workers	22%	0%
Whit Sunday	18%	58%
Saint Valentine's day	9%	33%
Ukrainian Independence's Day	4%	22%

(Vakulova, p. 33).

The most recent survey (November 2014), conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine regarding the self-identification of Ukrainians, shows that in Donbas the “citizen of Ukraine” component of self-identification is the lowest as compared to the rest of Ukraine. However, it is still the most prominent one in the general

composition of the self – identity: 34, followed by “resident of the region” – 27, resident of a location – 19, and a citizen of the former USSR – 14% (Slide 1). <http://i-soc.com.ua/institute/news.php>

There are many surveys that persistently show since 1991 that Donbas residents want Russian to be recognized as the second official language in Ukraine. I will quote the latest one. In April of 2015, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology conducted a survey on the status of Russian language in Ukraine. Over 66% of residents of Eastern Ukraine, including Donbas, would vote “yes” in a hypothetical referendum on whether Russian language should be granted the status of the second state (official language) in Ukraine (<http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=517&page=1>).

The same Institute conducted in March of 2015 a study on the geopolitical orientations of Ukrainians, in which Eastern Ukraine (together with Donbas) favored the integration into the Customs Unions (29.8%) over the integration with the European Union (20.1%), while 32.4% stated that Ukraine should remain a neutral country (<http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=507&page=1>).

We should add to this also an orthodox religious identity, which in 2004 occupied a fifth place in the hierarchy of identity features of Donetsk residents (Chernych, Malanchuk, p. 75).

These are the data from various sociological surveys.

What portrait of Donbas regional identity can we draw from these data?

There are several features that define this identity:

- A strong regionalism
- Paternalistic state
- Internationalism
- Collectivism
- Appreciation of soviet legacy: social justice, stability, proletarian pride
- Rejection of ethnic nationalism

Evgeni Shibalov, a journalist from Donetsk, correspondent of the Ukrainian weekly *Zerkalo nedeli*, explains that Donetsk people feel special because they keep the system running. Their hard work is essential for the good functioning of the system. You have to do your part, no matter what, because otherwise the system will stop functioning. Hence, the stoicism and patience of Donbas residents: “You have to bear your part of the common burden by sacrificing your personal life. In a mine or in a plant a weakness of one is a death threat for everybody. So hold on!” From this notion of necessary, unavoidable harshness of industrial labour comes also a

disdain for peasants work and the work in offices
(http://gazeta.zn.ua/POLITICS/ispoved_donetskogo.html).

Because the system has to be stable, change is unwelcomed. As Shibalov notes, stability is a favorite word of politicians and managers from Donetsk. Indeed, the motto of the Party of Regions, which basis was in Donbas, was *From stability to prosperity*. Stability is good. Stability means that things will not get worse. Stability means that everything works in a once given rhythm.

This text by Evgeni Shibalov was written on August 6, 2010, eight months after Yanukovich was elected President of Ukraine. During the Euromaidan protests in Kyiv, in Donetsk people did not approve of disorder and violence that they were seeing on Maidan. They kept working, because the production line cannot be stopped – coal has to be produced, somebody needs to feed the population, stability needs be preserved. This non-acceptance of civil unrest was widespread in Donetsk region – suffices to remind ourselves of Antimaidan in Kyiv, or, for instance, addresses to Yanukovich to disperse Maidan, adopted by Donetsk regional council of people’s deputies (<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2421338?isSearch=True>).

These objective features of Donbas regional identity were used by the regional political and business elite to create propagandist clichés of the industrial, hard-working Donbas which feeds the whole Ukraine. This image had its antipode of “zarobitchany” (migrant workers or Gastarbaiters) from Western Ukraine who go abroad in search of journey-work (Rasevych, 2014). And because Western Ukrainians already were perceived by Donbas people as bearers of nationalist ideology, this propagandist opposition of Donbas worker to a Galician “hireling” reinforced the anti-Ukrainian (anti-nationalist) element of Donbas regional identity. The opposition between hard-working Donbas that feeds the whole Ukraine and Western-Ukrainian Gastarbaiters stereotypes were skillfully used by Yanukovich political strategists in the presidential electoral campaign of 2004 to mobilize electoral votes of South-Eastern Ukraine.

The basic features of Donbas regional identity – collectivism, appreciation of Soviet legacy, strive for stability – were also used in the propaganda by pro-Western Ukrainian elites during the Orange revolution to discredit Viktor Yanukovich, because he represented Donbas. In the reading of orangist propaganda, Yanukovich was a thief, a criminal, a former convict, who represented a semi-criminal, oligarchic clans of Donbas (Popov, n/d).

In the 1990s the snobbish-condescending cliché of Donbas as a land of lowbrow lumpen-proletariat, Homo Sovieticus, who strive for a strong ruler and cheap food and drinks and do not care about history, language, and culture, was to be found in intellectual and artistic circles of “European” Ukrainian elite. Since 2004 this cliché entered political and media discourse as a popular interpretation of Donbas.

Donbas' Soviet nostalgia becomes a symbol of backwardness and obscurantism. This nostalgia is explained not by the memories of stability, social security and pride in one's own work, but by the slave's craving for a piece of bread and blind adoration of a powerful ruler, a father who provides work and bread, be it Stalin or tsar. Donbas' internationalism (multinationalism) becomes an absence of Ukrainian patriotism or nationalism. The Russian language, which by historical reasons became a lingua franca of the melting pot of Donbas, becomes a tool of Russian imperialism, an agent of Russification of the Ukrainian land of Donbas. Donbas' loyalty to memory of the Great Victory in the WWII becomes a veneration of the Soviet totalitarianism. Donbas' orthodoxy and respect of traditions becomes a symbol of rejection of European ideals of tolerance and openness to all kinds of diversity.

The framing of the Donbas rebellion against the Euromaidan Ukraine follows precisely this line of reasoning: retrograde, dark, paternalistic, pro-Russian Donbas against modern, bright, free, and democratic Euro –Ukraine. Here are some examples from Ukrainian politicians.

Yuriy Lutsenko, head of the Poroshenko Block party, commenting on September 2014 Minsk agreements, [stated on September 9, 2014](#): “Even areas of Lugandon (the so-called Lugansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republics), which we do not control now, are part of Ukraine...” (By the way, one of the members of Batkivschyna party, Hryhoriy Nemyria, officially asked Poroshenko to explain the usage by Lutsenko of this term and to apologize publicly before residents of Lugansk and Donetsk regions - <http://www.nakanune.ru/news/2014/9/9/22368421/>). Origin of the term Lugandon is not clear. It can be interpreted in several ways: as an homonym of Uganda; or condom; as a combination of Lugan(sk) and Don(etsk).

Here is Egor Firsov, deputy of Verkhovna Rada from Klychko's Udar party, commenting on Akhnetov's transfer of DTEK (Donetsk fuel-energy) head-quarters to Zaporozhe: “Hold on, people of Zaporozhe! Do not let them transform your land in a reservation of beggars and criminals!...Fight! Do not let Putin and Akhemov create a Zaporozhe People's Republic!” (http://censor.net.ua/news/306891/ne_dayite_prevratit_svoyi_krayi_v_nischuyu_kriminalnuyu_r_ezervatsiyu_deputat_firsov_o_perezde_ahmetova).

Here is a title of an article which correlates with Uganda: “Daunbas and Luganda trebuiut “nezavisimosti s obshchim ekonomicheskim prostranstvom” (Daunbas and Luganda demand “independence with a common economic space” (<http://pressa.today/politics/daunbas-i-luganda-trebuyut-nezavisimosti-s-obshhim-ekonomicheskim-prostranstvom/>)).

Daunbass is a play of words - Don/Dawn disease. There are also kolorady (because of the black-orange colors of the Georgian ribbon, symbol of Soviet victory in WW2; these colors resemble the strips of a Colorado potato beetles, wide-spread in Ukraine; slow-witted Sovky (from the word “Soviet” - a sarcastic, pejorative name people who are nostalgic for Soviet times). They

just want stability and order, even if it is all based on corruption. They do not want to be free, oh no. They do not understand revolutionary slogans about individual freedom, free market, human rights. What rights? They are happy in their ignorance and serfdom. They are so blind they cling to a criminal turned President because he is one of theirs. They are servile and dumb sheep, happy to have some hay in their manger, and even that hay does not have to be of the best quality. And they drink a lot. Meet “Homo Sovieticus”.

<http://mtmfashion.blogspot.ca/2014/04/17.html>

<http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1334772-v-kiyivskiy-galereyi-rosiyskikh-okupantiv-trimali-uklitsi>

(picture).

The interpretation of Donbas people as Homo Sovieticus is found also in the academic discourse. In an interview to Dzerkalo Tyzhnia on April 2, 2015, professor and doctor of psychology Vadym Vasiutynskyi explained that Donbas residents do not realize that it was them who provoked the war in Donbas by “following those who participated in the referendum or those who were throwing themselves under the tanks (Ukrainian tanks – HM), saying ‘Putin, send the troops in’”. They cannot apprehend their own fault, because they were not “subjects of conscious, thought-out (reflected) action with the anticipation of results”. They are post-Soviet, post-totalitarian people, and as such they are not able of being in charge of themselves and of their lives. They trust power holders to be responsible for them

(<http://expres.ua/news/2015/04/02/130579-vatnyky-donbasu-ne-zbozhevolily-vony-prosto-ne-vmiyut-po-inshomu-myslyty>).

The argument of Homo Sovieticus is used also by the deputy director of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine Evhen Holovakha, when he explains a high participation of voters in “illegal” elections in self-proclaimed popular republics of Donetsk and Luhansk on November 2, 2014. He believes that voters are nostalgic for the golden days of their Soviet past. They see in leaders of the separatist movement leaders of the Soviet Union, and the separatists are aware of this identification and use it to lure residents of Donbas. All “normal” businessmen and “advanced” intelligentsia have left Donbas. So the separatists are stuck with homo sovieticus who remained, said Evhen Holovakha.

Another factor that explains a high turn out during the election day is the Stockholm syndrome which residents of Donbas developed. Stockholm syndrome is a relationship of sympathy that emerges between a victim and an aggressor. This sympathy can be unilateral or mutual. Being in a state of profound shock, the victim starts to justify actions of the aggressor, to have kindly feelings towards him/her. Once the “occupied territories” of Lugansk and Donetsk are free from “Russian terrorists” and “separatists”, the victims (Donbas residents) will accept the return of Ukrainian authorities “normally” (<http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/3439515-vybory-na-donbasse-luidy-holosovaly-yz-za-nostalhyy-po-sssr>).

So here it is again, this stereotype of backward, Soviet Donbas. However, this time only the supporters of the DPR and LPR are inscribed into it.

Finally, here is the president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, saying:

“We will win by peace. We will have jobs – they do not have any. We will have pensions – they do not have any. We will have social protection of children and retirees – they do not have any. Our children will go to schools and kindergartens, theirs will sit in basements, because they do not know how to do anything” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mr0TUpYPOJg#t=3201> – starts at 53.06 - <http://www.stopfake.org/lozh-petr-poroshenko-poobeshhal-cto-deti-donbassa-budut-sidet-v-podvalah/>)

Again, what we see here is an image of terrorists, who are not able to do anything. They are incapable of providing for the people they took as hostages, according to Kyiv’s regime point of view. DPR and LPR “separatists” cannot create jobs, cannot provide social security, cannot assure education for kids. Only European Ukraine, led by a corrupt oligarchic regime, can do that. In the logic of this regime, the Donbas insurgency is shelling its own residential areas and infrastructure just to be able to blame all of this destruction on Kyiv. These “terrorists” are not normal human beings, they are an impersonation of evil, so, by definition, these monsters are capable of nonsensical acts of cruelty that defy human logic.

Unleashing by the Kyiv regime of the so-called “anti-terrorist” operation against Donbas, that did not accept Euromaidan, was facilitated and provoked by the same ideological underpinning: educated, free, active Ukraine against an ignorant, enslaved, passive Donbas. Donbas was not even able to rebel itself – as a mantra of Ukrainian media and of the official Kyiv goes, Putin’s Russia ignited the revolt and sent its commandos to lead the resistance. Kyiv’s initial refusal to negotiate with DPR and LPR, as well as attempts to sabotage the negotiations stems from the same complex of superiority of the “European” Kyiv vis-à-vis a “Soviet” Donetsk.

‘European’ Ukraine dehumanizes ‘Soviet Ukraine’. The dehumanization means seeing others as less than humans (Maiese, 2003), denying humanness to others, that is having a fully human mind, including the capacity to act (intentionality and free will) and to experience feelings and emotions (Waytz and Schroeder, p.6). The dehumanization can occur on an intergroup and on an interpersonal basis. It is dangerous because it often paves the way to atrocities such as war crimes and genocide. The history of humanity provides many examples. In the so-called animalistic dehumanization people are denied the uniquely human characteristic, such as morality, intelligence, self-control, and are likened to animals (Haslam, 2006, p. 258). For instance, in the racist description in the States Afro-Americans were compared to apes. Nazis referred to Jews as rats. Hutus involved in the Rwanda genocide called Tutsis cockroaches. The dehumanization is dangerous as it often paves the way to brutal treatment or to mass killing of the “Other” (Maiese, 2014). The human history provides many examples: the Holocaust, in which over 7 million Jews perished in the hands of the Nazi regime; the slaughter of Tutsi by

Hutus in the Rwandan genocide; the Vietnam War. By dehumanizing the Other, by conceiving them as subhuman creatures, as enemies, the dehumanizers exclude the others from the moral community (Smith, <http://www.npr.org/2011/03/29/134956180/criminals-see-their-victims-as-less-than-human>), thus facilitating and legitimizing aggression against the subhumans. Like European colonialists of Africa, who saw Africans as barbaric and incapable of managing their own affairs, the “European” Kyiv regime perceives “Daunbas” people as slaves of the Soviet system, puppets of Putin’s Russia, incapable of their own thought and action. “European”, “democratic” Ukraine stubbornly refuses to see that these “passive”, “retrograde” “colorady”, “vatniki”⁴, “daunbasy” have an agency of their own – to rebel, to fight, to create an alternative to an oligarchic regime in Kyiv.

It is not difficult to transform the dehumanized other into an enemy. The propaganda embeds in people’s mind a “hostile imagination” (Philip Zimbardo, n/a), a psychological construction which prepares the public to the idea that the “Other” can be segregated, tormented, even killed. It is much easier to convince the population that war is necessary if you present your perceived enemy as a threat to the nation, a vermin, a Colorado beetle destroying Ukraine (see the image above). The on-going “anti-terrorist operation” by the Ukrainian armed forces against the Donbas insurgency is justified and fuelled in part by the dehumanization of Donetsk and Lugansk. It has not reached yet the level of government-sponsoring campaign, but the images of “terrorists” and “separatists” in the political discourse and social media are wide-spread.

There are sober voices in Ukraine who provide an objective analysis of the regional identity of Donbas, which has a direct continuity with the emergence of the DPR and LPR. But these voices are found mostly in the academic discourse. For instance, a collection of articles *Stosunky skhodu ta zakhodu Ukrayiny: subiekty, interesy, tsinnosti*, which was published in 2007, in the aftermath of Orange Revolution is a clear indicator of the realization by Ukrainian sociologists, historians, political scientists of the threat to unity of Ukraine, which comes from a real regional division between Western and Eastern Ukraine. What comes out of their reflections is that two epitomes of these two Ukrainians – Donbas and Halychyna – have two different collective identities, two different models of national project. As Lugansk sociologist Kononov puts it, the Donbas version of the modern Ukrainian nation is based on civil citizenship, while in the Halychyna vision the

⁴ The term *vatnik* was used in the pejorative meaning by representatives of the Russian liberal milieu as a symbol of Homo Sovieticus since 2011. *Vatnik* stands for negative traits of Russians, according to the author of the graphical representation of *Vatnik*, Anton Chadski. For him *vatnik* represents a certain part of Russian people who are blinded by a primitive, backward patriotism and idolatry of an autocratic leader. An ideal patriot, according to Anton Chadski, is composed of one third of envy, one third of stupidity, and one third of hatred (<http://snob.ru/selected/entry/82278>). Pro-patriotic Russians appropriated this term and are now using it in a positive sense as people, proud of their Soviet heritage: the original meaning of the word “*vatnik*” is “quilted jacket”, a common outerwear during Soviet times. Soviet soldiers who fought in the WWII and defeated Nazi Germany, wore it; Soviet workers who built factories, plants, and railroads, wore it. That is why *vatnik* stands for achievements of the Soviet times for many Russians, and they call themselves *vatniki*. This word has become a symbol of patriotism and love of the country. For instance, during the official opening ceremony of the winter Olympic Games of 2014 in Sochi the Russian national team was dressed in quilted jackets.

Ukrainian nation is determined by ethnic loyalty. Both versions of nation project are rooted in history of these two regions and are part and parcel of the value system which defines the self-identity of the inhabitants of these regions. The Ukrainian political elite exploits these differences, pursuing their own benefits and not thinking about the national interests. Only civil society movement can unite Ukraine (Kononov, p. 227).

Lviv historian [Vasyl Rasevych](#), when discussing the division between Eastern and Western Ukraine, talks about the proletarian, international Donbas, whose historical memory is much closer to the Russian politics of memory. He also sees in the “separatists”, “Lugansk”, and “Donbass” the continuation of the old cliché of “Easterners” that was popular in Western Ukrainian discourse and which corresponded to the description of Donbas, which I provided at the beginning of the article. He explains that Ukrainian “Westerners” perceived “Easterners” as Ukrainians, but spoiled by Soviet propaganda, which lied and concealed from them the true history. Westerners believed that their mission is to convert Easterners back to their national roots, which they betrayed. Like experienced teachers that explain to first-year students the ABC, “Westerners” with their “ethno-cultural potential” wanted to convince Easterners that their (Westerners) model of society is the only correct one, a truly Ukrainian one. Here we see the same “civilizational” mission that of European colonialism which cost millions of lives to those who “enlightened” Europeans wanted to civilize against their own will.

As Rasevych writes, “Westerners, for some reason, could not apprehend that a mixed population of Donbas can feel quite comfortable without embroidered shirts, without celebration of the established cycle of Christian holidays, and without the cult of fighters for a unified Ukrainian state”. And neither Westerners, nor Easterners did not give a slightest thought to the idea that in a democratic society everybody has a right to nurture culture and tradition that she/he cherishes the most (Rasevych, 2014).

My point is precisely this: in a democratic Ukraine that the current corrupt oligarchic regime in Kyiv pretends to build, there is no place for those who have a different opinion and who do not want to celebrate culture and tradition, imposed on them by force. As long as Ukrainian political and intellectual elite see Donetsk and Lugansk republics as terrorists and separatists, not as human being with views and values, different from their own, there will be no peace in Ukraine, and “Western” and “Eastern” Ukrainians will continue killing each other in the name of “European” civilization.

Both Euromaidan and Donbas rebellion stood up for the same values – normal salaries, social protection, transparent governance, honest judges, and non-corrupt police. These are the values that could unite two different civilization projects, represented by Donbas and Halychyna. Again, Ukrainian academics already voiced these values in the political and social crisis, which followed coming to power of pro-Western orange camp in 2004 (see Dychkovska and Vakubova, for instance). Ukraine was then on the brink of a break-up. In 2014 it broke up in a fratricidal war because of the total incapability of the political elite to engage in an open, democratic

negotiation with Anti-Maidan Ukraine. Because of the corruption of elite who again pursue only their own interests, camouflaging it under nationalist slogans, it is up to ordinary Ukrainians, Ukrainian civil society, to put aside dehumanizing, degrading stereotypes and engage in a respectful, reconciliatory discussion.

The longer the armed conflict between Ukraine and Donbas continues, the harder it will be to arrive at reconciliation. This conflict/civil war in Ukraine risks turning into a protracted armed face-off, which will ignite the hatred even more and the destruction of the enemy will be seen as the only way to end the war. Solving of problems that led to this conflict will become very difficult, as in any such conflict (Maiese, 2014). Psychologists believe that the way to alleviate or reverse dehumanization lies in the humanization, development of empathy, building of personal ties between conflicting parties, and the pursuit of common goals (ibid). Precisely the lack of personal relationships between Donbas as the region embracing the pro-Russian civilizational project, and Halychyna, a part of Ukraine which is Europe-oriented, is one of the reasons of the dehumanization of Donbas residents by the current Ukrainian political elite and media. It is more difficult to develop empathy towards a stranger, especially if this stranger is perceived as the “Other”. As for the pursuit of common goals, they could be: formation of the autonomous, strong and just Ukrainian state which would not depend neither on Russian, not on American-European geopolitics and would be a full-fledged subject of the world politics; creating mechanisms of social protection, of the development of free initiative and establishment of clear rules in the economy which would support the cooperation between the state and the entrepreneurs; a democratic governance; providing citizens with opportunities for self-realization; developing the culture in which would be preserved both the positive achievements of the Soviet period and of the national liberation movement (Dychkovska, p. 65). The program of reconciliation is ready. What Ukraine needs, is the political will to realize it.

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