

Similar but not equal

Contemporary representations of Ukraine on Russian news websites



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Boris Duregger

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Supervisor: Dr. M. Bader

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Preface

Ukraine and Russia are more than just neighbours. The history of these two countries, for instance, are closely connected. Up until the post-Soviet period, both Ukrainians and Russians continue to argue about whether medieval Kievan Rus' was “Ukrainian” or “Russian” (Velychenko 2000, 140). Many Ukrainians lived under Russian rule for centuries; first in the Russian Empire, and later in the Russia-dominated Soviet Union. Also, Ukraine and Russia are entangled by the common Orthodox religion and by a partially shared East-Slavic culture (Kappeler 2014, 115). Therefore it is not surprising Ukrainians and Russians share, to a certain extent, a common memory. However, history and memory remain controversial issues in the Russian-Ukrainian relations. A “War of memories” is going on between the two Slavic countries; both Russia and Ukraine use (and abuse) historical issues such as the heritage of Kievan Rus', the Holodomor, and the Second World War as political weapons (Ibid.). It is against this background that the research of this thesis takes place. The way the Ukrainian and Russian cultures intertwine brings tension to the subject of this study, i.e., contemporary Russian representations of Ukraine.

Although, perhaps more importantly, it is apparent that Ukraine and Russia are at odds with each other at this present time. After the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014, a war broke out in Donbass in eastern Ukraine. The current Ukrainian-Russian crisis, in which pro-Russian separatists – allegedly supported by Russian troops – are fighting Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine, is still developing at the time of writing. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine reported in May 2017 about ceasefire violations both in Donetsk and Luhansk region. Also, mention is made of shellings that took place in other Donbass cities such as Avdiivka, Sentianivka, and Yasynuvata (OSCE 2017). Russia itself still denies involvement in the armed conflict in Ukraine's east (Rybak 2017; Amaro 2017), but independent think tanks such as Atlantic Council, as well as NATO, regard Russian military involvement as a fact (Czuperski et al. 2015; NATO 2014). Different academics have ranging views on Russia's intentions in the war in Donbass, spanning from statements that Putin is pursuing a revisionist agenda (Wilson 2014, 162) to views that Russia under Putin aims to maintain the status quo (Sakwa 2014, 117). However it may be, it seems fair to argue that Russia sees Ukraine as part of its strategic orbit and is, in one way or another, involved in the conflict along its western border (Robinson 2016).

This brings me to the research question of this thesis: how is the Ukrainian crisis reflected in contemporary Russian representations of Ukraine? It is the Russian involvement in a conflict, that was not initially a primary Russian affair, that substantiates the perspective of this thesis: the ways in which Russia represents Ukraine instead of vice versa. Thus bringing us to the aim of this study: to demonstrate Russia's view of Ukrainians and their nation at a time when Russia is intervening in Ukraine. What are the prevailing Russian stereotypes about Ukrainians? Or, to put it differently, which images of Ukrainians are emerging from the Russian discourse?

In order to answer this question, the key focus is on four different media sources: the electronic versions of two Russian state newspapers – *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* (kp.ru) and *Izvestiya* (iz.ru) – and two Russian news websites: *Pravda.ru* and *Life.ru*. However, I will mainly use *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* and *Life.ru*. The choice for *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* is justified, because it is Russia's most popular newspaper (Yatsyk 2016, 253). In 2014 the newspaper had a daily circulation of approximately 650,000 copies. The Friday edition even has a circulation of about two million copies inside Russia (and almost one million more outside of Russia, SRAS 2014). *Life.ru* and *Izvestiya* are relevant sources for this thesis, since they are both partially owned by Aram Gabrelyanov who is notoriously loyal to Putin and the Kremlin (Khvostunova 2013; Tlis 2014).¹ Consequently, *Life.ru* and *Izvestiya* are representative sources, in the sense that they are likely to represent the Kremlin's line. Moreover, Gabrelyanov has been referred to as “the tabloid king who shapes how Russians see the world” (Miller 2015). Arguably, thus, *Life.ru* and *Izvestiya* are also representative sources because the messages of their news releases resonate with the Russian audience. Finally, the choice for the fourth source of this study, online newspaper *Pravda.ru*, is justified because it is one of Russia's most popular online resources; as of 2012 four million “unique users” visited the news website every month (that included *Pravda*'s pages in foreign languages, LaDelle Bennett 2012, 374). Moreover, judging from the popularity of European newspaper's websites, *Pravda.ru* is among the top one hundred most popular newspapers in Europe (4 International Media and Newspapers 2017).

However, since this thesis only focusses on a handful of media sources, it is not claiming to be reflective of contemporary Russian images of Ukraine in general. Rather, my efforts can be regarded as a case study of how the Ukrainian crisis is reflected in Russian representations of Ukraine.

¹ For instance, Gabrelyanov said in an interview: “Putin is the nation's father, and there is nothing you can demand from him” (Khvostunova 2013).

The first chapter is an elaboration of the methodology of my research, i.e., the academic discipline known as imagology; a discipline that investigates how nations and their cultures are represented in cultural expressions such as literature and film, but also media. I will explore and explain the different assumptions and approaches that imagology utilises in order to analyse characterisations of nations. The focus will be laid on insights that can serve as important tools for this specific thesis.

In order to answer to research question – how is the Ukrainian crisis reflected in contemporary Russian representations of Ukraine – it will be necessary to examine how Russia has represented Ukraine in the past. The second chapter is devoted to this purpose. The third chapter then presents and analyses the results of my own empirical research against the background of not only imagological theory, but also the Russian images of Ukraine of earlier times. Thus, I will be able to contextualize my findings; are the current images of Ukraine reminiscent of older ways of portraying, or do they differ? As my research will demonstrate, the current crisis has not resulted in completely different Russian representations of Ukraine.

In terms of time frame, I will examine reporting between December 2013 – when the Russia-Ukraine relations deteriorated due to the Euromaidan and the current crisis began – and June 2017; the moment I concluded this research. This enables me to gain an insight into the repercussions that the current crisis had on how Russia depicts Ukraine.

Finally, it could be argued that conflicts such as Euromaidan and the conflict in Donbass are crises that resulted partially from Russia's view on Ukrainian matters, which Russia sees as its own matters as well, due to the interrelationship between the two countries that I explained earlier. In this respect, my research can also contribute to a better comprehension of the Ukrainian crisis.

Chapter I

Insights from imagology: exposition of the theoretical framework

In this Master's thesis, I will build on the notions of the academic discipline known as image studies, or imagology. This chapter is meant to set out the different conceptions and views that imagology has developed over the years. At the present moment, imagology has become truly interdisciplinary: the discipline has its origins in comparative literature, but it elaborates on approaches and insights from psychology, sociology and social anthropology (Chew 2006, 180).

However, I would like to stress that imagology is not a form of sociology. It examines a discourse rather than a society (Beller and Leerssen 2007, xiii). Imagologists try to unravel the mental images that we have of the Other and of ourselves. The latter – the mental images of ourselves – is not unimportant, because the nationality represented (what we call the *spected*) takes shape in the context of the representing text or discourse (the so-called *spectant*). It is, therefore, essential to grasp the dynamics between the images of the Other (*hetero-images*) and those of one's own identity (*self-images* or *auto-images*) (Ibid., xiii-xiv). Typically, images of the Other are different from self-images, with the result that self-images materialise with more clarity (Neumann 2009, 275). Thus, hetero-images and auto-images are very much connected. Or, put differently: “Valorizing the Other is, of course, nothing but a reflection of one's own point of view” (Beller 2007, 6). When representing a culture, there are always two entities involved – self-perception is never far away.

Imagology: a very short history of how it came to its present form

The traditional concept of ‘national character’ dates back to ancient times. Texts from classic authors like Herodotus and Caesar, who portrayed foreign peoples, were not free from stereotypical depictions of peoples and nations (Chew 2006, 180). In the 17th century, writers of literature and drama could choose from specific ‘national types’ to depict in their works; the 18th century was characterized by the point of view that national characters could be linked to politics. More precisely: it was believed that certain types of national character

corresponded to despotism, aristocracy or democracy, so to one of the three classical governmental systems. This uncritical position towards national characterizations remained in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. In fact, this essentialist position took further shape with thinkers like Fichte and Hegel, who went even one step further with their notions of ‘Geist’ or ‘Volksgeist’ (Ibid., 181).

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Many studies in the field of image studies (Beller 2007; Lee 2002; Zacharasiewicz 2007) mention the ideas of Benedict Anderson that he worked out in his famous 1983 book *Imagined Communities*. He argued that the nation is an ‘imagined community’ and the identities we attribute to it are “cultural fantasies” or “social constructs”. Although it is impossible for the members of a community to know all their fellow-members, everyone has an image of the community in their mind. By the same token, Anderson argued that national and ethnic identities are mere constructs and that texts play a role in the creation of such identities. In the introduction of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson notices: “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (1991, 6). A logic inference, I would say, after the statement that all communities are imagined. However, this is exactly what I believe is important for any imagological study: we can leave the question of whether a national characterization is accurate behind, because there is no reality by which we can measure the truth or falsity of a certain characterization. What we can, and should do, however is to elucidate and interpret the process by which the imagination of a nation takes shape.

Also, mention should be made of Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, theorists from postcolonial studies who affected the more modern frames of image studies. In his famous 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes that the way in which a black man perceives himself is determined by *the other*, by the white man and his negative utterances. What we can take from this, I believe, is that although Benedict Anderson is right in portraying nations and communities as imagined constructs, the effects of imaginations can be very real. The spectant, to use the terminology of imagology, can have actual influence on the self-perception of the spected.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said’s famous and controversial book from 1978, an observation is made that is relevant for my research and image studies in general. Said notices

that the postmodern, electronic world has reinforced the stereotypes about the Orient, because television and movies “have forced information into more and more standardized molds” (2006, 26). I think it is fair to argue that at this current moment, with internet and online media, this trend to present information in a “standardized mold” is even stronger. The more sophisticated media aside, information on the internet is often compressed into short texts – Russian news website life.ru is a perfect example. Such formats do not leave much space for nuanced understandings of the matter under debate.

Another important intellectual for the development of image studies is British-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist Ernest Gellner. More or less on the same line with Anderson (although Anderson criticized Gellner for implying that ‘true’ communities exist (1991, 6)), Gellner wrote in *Nations and Nationalism*, his famous book from 1983: “It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round” (2008, 54). By now it should be clear why this is an important view for imagology. Gellner’s assertion shows that the nation is above all the product of human thought. Consequently, it calls attention to the constructedness of the mental images that we have of the Other and ourselves.

Imagology and its current assumptions and approaches

When people finally abandoned a belief in the ‘realness’ of national characters as explanatory models, the actual emergence of imagology as a critical study could take place (Leerssen 2007, 21). Eventually, literary scholars began to work according to this new paradigm in the years following the Second World War. At first image studies focused on representations of nations in literature, but non-literary works can be just as useful as research material (Stockhorst 2006), like media in my case. Joep Leerssen (2007, 21) refers to those studies that worked according to the new paradigm and its new approaches as post-national, or trans-national. It meant that nationality could be considered and studied as a construct or even as a misunderstanding. Thus, the new view entailed that nationality was brought into being by being formulated; analysing it meant that one has to take into account its subjectivity, variability and contradictions (Ibid., 22).

Indeed, it can be argued that the stereotypical nature of national characterizations is often not just due to subjectivity, but the result of biased perspectives or even of conscious distortions that serve certain goals (Neumann 2009, 276). This could possibly be the case in

my own research given the current Ukraine-Russia conflict; it could be beneficial for Russia to portray Ukraine in a certain way. Thus, there is a performative aspect to national stereotypes, in a sense that they can be utilized to persuade. Consequently, national stereotypes may be useful for nations that grapple with questions of their own identity, power and authority. Since national characterizations are on numerous occasions consciously constructed, it is also important to take the way they are presented into account. Analysing the formal presentation of characteristics of particular nations is just as meaningful as the determination of these characteristics. Narrativity and aesthetic value, so the symbolic form of what is framed as a national peculiarity, are very much elements of national stereotyping. Thus, the genre or media affects the image of the national characteristics that are being represented (Ibid., 277).

It is also being argued that the cultural power of national stereotypes is located in the ongoing processes of translation, renarration and remediation. The persuasiveness is the result of the inter- and transmedial adaptations, not so much of the national stereotypes themselves. The word 'transmedial' is used here, because national stereotypes are not bound to a single medium but manifest themselves in a multitude of media. As a rule, the same national character traits are represented not only in diverse genres and media, but also over and over again, over decades and centuries. These features contribute to the stabilisation and solidification of national images (Ibid., 278-79).

In this Master's thesis, I will attempt to find out if this holds true for Russian representations of Ukraine. I will be mapping the way in which Russia portrayed Ukraine in the past before I turn to my own research about the contemporary representations. This gives me the possibility to find out if old characterizations are indeed still evoked today. It can make a characterization more convincing; referring to images that are circulating already for a long time, generates a sense of familiarity on the part of the spectator, who has already previously encountered the presented image, be it in fiction, images, jokes, or songs. Linking national stereotypes to what is assumed to be general cultural knowledge, suggests a relation between representation and reality; hence, stereotypes appear to be authentic (Ibid., 279).

Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, an important contributor to the study of imagology, also shows why images can seem very real to us. Zacharasiewicz (2007, 2) has distinguished two contradictory tendencies in the way people tend to represent foreign nations. Firstly, as has been outlined by social psychologists and in studies of prejudices, there is a tendency in which foreigners are judged and described from an ethnocentric stance. Thus, one's own

culture is used as a point of reference when perceiving other cultures. This inclination often goes hand in hand with the belief that one's own ethnicity and culture is superior to alien cultures. At the same time, another factor can be noted: a tendency to delineate the Other as the opposite of what we perceive as our own identity. So, the wish to see the Other as an exotic and positive counterimage of one's own mundane ordinariness. In whichever way a culture is presented, it has been argued that some readers tend to connect what they read in a text to corresponding elements in the extraliterary world. By doing so, the connection between a work of art and the actual world becomes very close (Ibid.). I argue that consumers of media will be even more inclined to make this connection with reality given the assumption that the media are reflections of the actual world.

There is a vicious circle at work in how we perceive foreign nations: once stereotypes arose, they determine our perception and we see what we expect to see. Thus, stereotyped representations will in all likelihood produce prejudices, and prejudices confirm stereotyped notions. In other words, preconceived notions, prejudices and stereotypes determine our way of seeing and judging (Beller 2007, 4). Or, as the often cited statement (Beller 2007; Kunczik 2002, 2016) from 1922 by Walter Lippmann goes: "For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see." This implies that from the wealth of available information, we select what conforms to the image we already know (Kunczik 2002, 41). Members of different groups bring their own backgrounds and thus their own distinctive perspective ("selective perception"). But since they all have their own points of view, it also means that their judgements will differ ("selective evaluation", Kunczik 2016, 104). It can be concluded that our images of foreign peoples are predominantly the result of selective observation and selective value judgments as expressed in, for example, literary representations (Beller 2007, 5).

The prominent Austrian scholar Franz Karl Stanzel very well summarizes the assumptions I explained above: after Stanzel (1998, 11) mentions Benedict Anderson and his idea that nations are merely imagined communities, Stanzel puts forward the position that the images, or "mirages", that different nations have of each other should be understood as structures from the imagination, in other words: hetero-images are, in essence, fictions. Those images have little to do with actual experience. Finally, Stanzel points to another issue that is valuable for my research: he mentions that in times of political conflict and war, images of the Other come to the surface of our awareness. That is, we tend to forget these images that were once created – they are in deeper layers of our consciousness, until tensions and conflicts

between countries arise (Ibid.). Given the current conflict between Ukraine and Russia, Stanzel's comment seems to imply that representations of Ukrainians that existed in Russia in the past, are now brought to the fore again. As I wrote earlier, by first mapping the way in which Russia used to depict Ukraine I will be able through my own research to verify if those older characterizations are now indeed revitalized.

Imagology: conclusion and method

Finally, what follows are the methodological assumptions – some are discussed earlier in this chapter – as they have emerged over the last decades in imagology. I reckon these are useful guidelines for every imagological study. Firstly, image studies is about cultural or national stereotypes, not about cultural or national identity (Leerssen 2007). The imagologist works with representations, and whether they are accurate or not is believed to be irrelevant. It is the presented discourse that matters, the text itself, not the reality behind it. Therefore, like stated earlier, imagology is not a form of sociology – it is a discipline that deals with representations, rather than with a society. The characterizations imagology addresses are not statements of fact that can be tested. That means that a factual statement like “The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system” is clearly outside the imagologist's area of interest, whereas a statement like “The Dutch are tolerant” is an example of what is referred to as *imagined discourse*; the research area of image studies. It may not be always very clear, however, what is imagined and what is not. As a rule, imagined discourse frames a nation as somehow different from the rest of humanity, as ‘typical’, and it gives characterological explanations for cultural differences. All this means that our sources are subjective; it is a factor that must be taken into account in the analysis (Ibid., 27-28).

The first task is to determine the tradition of a represented national image. To which extent is this tradition reinforced or, equally possible, negated? Or is the background tradition varied upon, mocked or ignored by the case in question (Ibid., 28)? Sometimes contradictory images can be observed in the way a nation is portrayed, but they might be two sides of the same coin. An example Leerssen (2007, 29) provides is Ireland: it has been portrayed as a country of mindless violence but the Ireland of poetic sentiment is familiar as well. When examined further, however, both images are opposed to reasonable realism. Further study is

thus needed to grasp the dynamics between such apparently opposing images. Another point that is desirable to take into consideration, is the intended audience of the text and how the deployment of national characterizations is geared to this target-audience (Ibid., 28). It is also valuable to find out, if possible, what the reception and impact of a text is. Finally, the study of how nations are represented is a comparative enterprise: it is about cross-national relations (Ibid., 29). This assumption adds value to my research; the love-hate relationship between Russia and Ukraine and the current conflict they are entangled in might not only be reflected on a political level, but also in the stereotypes about Ukrainians that exist in Russia.

Chapter II

Historical overview of Russian images of Ukraine

Before I will turn to contemporary Russian representations of Ukraine, I will – with the help of imagological tools – discuss how Russia has represented Ukrainians in earlier times. This chapter will not follow a chronological order; rather, it is structured according to what I consider to be the three most common Russian narratives on Ukraine: Ukrainians as part of the Russian nation; Ukrainians as the lesser Other; and Ukrainians as disloyal fascists (*Banderovtsy*). These three narratives, I argue, were not only the most common in the past but also nowadays. Therefore, the next chapter – in which I shall present my own empirical research – will follow the same structure. This is in order to strengthen the overarching argument of this study: the Ukrainian crisis has not fundamentally changed the ways in which Russia represents Ukraine.

Inclusion and friendship: Ukraine as part of Russia

In the seventeenth century, the terms “White Russian,” “Lithuanian,” and “Ukrainian” were still in general interchangeable for the residents of the Tsardom of Russia. The term “Rus” was used to refer to the entire East Slavic region, but slowly this word was used less and “Ukraine” started to acquire a distinct meaning (Torke 2003, 88).

A turning point occurred at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Ukrainian leader, or “hetman”, Ivan Mazepa turned against the Russians. This resulted in an image of Ukrainians as separatists or “Mazepists” (I will discuss this in the next section). However, this image slowly changed, which had everything to do with the fact that the higher-ranking figures of the Hetmanate² gradually integrated into the Russian nobility. Due to this, the center’s mistrust with regard to the Ukrainian elite decreased – a tendency that started in the mid-eighteenth century. As a result, the image of restive Cossacks and Mazepists slowly changed into “Little Russians” (*malorossy*) and loyal servants of the dynasty (Kappeler 2003a, 163-64). Consequently, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a positive image of

² The former name of a large part of present-day Ukraine.

the Little Russians as a “picturesque variant of the Russian people” was prevalent in the government and in Russia in general (Ibid., 164). The nobility of the Little Russians was increasingly regarded as Russian.

Throughout the nineteenth century, a general trend can be observed in which the Little Russians are perceived as part of the Russian people, both by the authorities and by most educated Russians (Miller 2003, 26). By the late nineteenth century, history was used to prove that Ukraine was Russian: when interpreting the early modern period, Russians highlighted those aspects that Ukrainians held in common with Russia (Kohut 2003, 86). It is also in this period of time that Russians would write about Ukrainian elements without specifying that they referred to something Ukrainian. This thus clearly shows that ‘Ukraine’ was naturally perceived as ‘Russia’ (Wilson 2009, 83). The early twentieth century continued this trend, which is particularly remarkable because in this period of time Russianness became an ethnic category – instead of a cultural standard – due to chauvinistic and xenophobic motives in Russian nationalism. As a consequence all non-Russians were now described as “aliens” (*inorodtsy*) except the Little Russians (and the Belarusians). The notion *Russian* was at the time used to refer to not only Russians, but also to Little Russians and Belarusians, so all the East Slavs. Thus, this points at the nation-building project that can be labelled the “big Russian nation”; on the one hand this was an ethnic concept that distinguished between Russians and other peoples of the empire, but at the same time this project disregarded the differences between Great, Little and White Russians by incorporating them all into one ethnic entity (Miller 2003, 26-27).

Also in the arts, Ukraine and Russia were often tarred with the same brush. Musorgskiy and his famous *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874) can serve as an example here: the finale of this suite is called ‘The Great Gate of Kiev’ but it is clearly permeated by Russian nationalism; exultant rhythm and pieces of Russian hymns are used to celebrate the surviving of Alexander II, who was nearly killed in Kiev. According to Wilson (2009, 84), the older idea of Kiev as ‘the mother of all Russian cities’ is evoked. In *The Cherry Orchard* (1903), Chekhov lets his heroine Lyuba Ranevskaya say: “God, how I love my own country!”. The action is taking place near Kharkiv in Ukraine, but in spite of that, it is obvious that the country Chekhov has in mind is not Ukraine but Russia. Also, Chekhov wrote several stories that take place in Crimea, such as *The Lady with a Lapdog* (1899), but in none of these stories does the reader encounter Ukrainian aspects. Thus, there was an equation of Ukraine and Russia, or in other words: “There was (...) nothing any the less Russian about ‘the

south” (Ibid., 85).

In spite of this point of view, it should be noted that the differences between Great Russians and Little Russians were not completely denied. For example, Miller (2003, 27) takes note of “The Cossack Way”, a 1898 short story by Ivan Bunin in which he writes about the differences between a *khokhol* (a Russian derogatory term for Ukrainians) and a Russian *muzhik*. The latter is according to Bunin a shabby figure, whereas the *khokhly* are described as wholesome, fresh-looking people. This way of describing the Self and the Other is reminiscent of a tendency that imagologist Waldemar Zacharasiewicz expounded: the wish to see the Other as a positive counterimage of one’s own mundane ordinariness (2007, 2), as I wrote in the chapter on imagology. This tendency was also prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century, when Ukraine was exoticized in Russian travelogues, similar to the way in which the Caucasus, Siberia and Poland were perceived (Shkandrij 2001, 67). In the travel-narrative literature of this period that was devoted to Ukraine, the tone was sometimes hostile, sometimes admiring; Ukraine seemed to be simultaneously foreign and familiar (Ibid.).

However, as I noted above, in the nineteenth century there is hardly any distinction made between the Great Russians and the Little Russians, and this turns out also to be the case in Bunin’s work: he makes a contrast between the Self and the Other, but in the same story he is nevertheless lyrical about the Ukrainian writer Shevchenko who he regards as a Russian writer. Bunin is representative of his generation: many authors of the time mention, for instance, Ukrainian and Russian events in the same breath. Therefore Miller concludes that the idea of Russian unity that encompasses all the East Slavs is a matter of course for those Russian writers (2003, 27). The fact that they not even explicitly mention that they believe the Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusians belong together, shows that “the notion of an “All-Russian” unity came naturally to their authors, as something that did not require explanations and proof” (Ibid.). Miller also observes that the Little Russians were seen as a “more picturesque, romantic version of Russianness” (Ibid.), especially in St. Petersburg and Moscow in the first half of the nineteenth century. This is also the way the Little Russians are represented in the Bunin story I discussed above.

What we can deduce from this, I think, is that in the first half of the nineteenth century, Little Russia was used to extend the Russian perception of the Self. Another example of this can be found in the way Little Russian history was used to complement what was missing in Muscovite Russian history; romantic features that were absent in Muscovite Russian history could be ‘obtained’ in the history of Little Russia. It is therefore not an

exaggeration to speak of a pro-Little Russian mood: at this moment of time there was a huge interest and also sympathy for Ukrainian themes in Russia (Miller 2003, 50-51).

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Also in post-Soviet Russia, Ukrainians are seen as very close relatives. Significantly, Yeltsin said in 1997:

“Russians and Ukrainians lived in a communal flat, so to speak. Our separation was painful. We had to divide the indivisible and test the resistance of normal human, even family, links. Some even took it into their heads to divide our common historical legacy ... we cannot get it out of our systems that the Ukrainians are the same as we are. That is our destiny, our common destiny” (cited in Wilson 2009, 307).

As this statement makes clear, Ukraine and Russia were seen as sibling peoples by the first President of the Russian Federation. It has been argued by Ihor Losiev (1999) that Russians tend to over-‘intimatise’ relations with Ukraine, by making use of metaphors of love, family, brotherhood and painful divorce. The same author calls this tendency to think that Russia and Ukraine cannot exist without each other a ‘Siamese twin’ complex (cited in Wilson 2009, 307). Indeed, this can be said of Yeltsin’s utterance that the separation of Ukraine and Russia (this is, needless to say, a reference to the breaking-up of the Soviet Union) was dividing the indivisible.

Historian George O. Liber formulates a similar thought: he argues that most members of the Russian political elite perceive the idea of an independent Ukrainian nation-state as “an existential threat to the Russian identity” (2017). Likewise, at the beginning of the twentieth century Russia showed similar reactions to Ukrainian pleas for autonomy. In June 1917, the Ukrainian Rada wrote a proclamation in which they ask the Russian government to declare publicly that “it is not against the national freedom of the Ukraine, against the right of the people to autonomy” (Daly and Trofimov 2009, 63). Prince Lvov, who at that moment led the Provisional Government,³ rejected the demands of the Ukrainian Rada. He wrote: “Do not take the perilous course of splitting up the forces of emancipated Russia. Do not divorce

³ The Provisional Government was established after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in March 1917, and lasted for approximately eight months until the October Revolution. In this period of time, there was ‘dual power’ in Russia: the Provisional Government shared power with the Petrograd Soviet.

yourself from our common native land” (Ibid., 65).

Thus, Prince Lvov gives the impression that the demands from the Ukrainian Rada would threaten the existence of Russia, even though the demands are, I think, very reasonable: although the proclamation is a call for autonomy, it declares that Ukraine does *not* want to break away from Russia. This instance shows that Ukrainian autonomy is not only perceived as a threat to Russian identity, but also to the well-being of the Russian state. Admittedly, it could be stated the Prince Lvov expresses this thought because he believes that Ukrainian autonomy can serve as an example for other peoples in Russia. But if that is indeed the case, it remains remarkable that Prince Lvov asks the Ukrainians – the *brother* Ukrainians, as he writes – not to *divorce* from Russia (italics mine). It is another example of over-‘intimatizing’ the relations with Ukraine; Russia comes across as a jealous and insecure lover, who does not want his wife – Ukraine – to become more independent.

Exclusion and discrimination: Ukrainians as the Other

‘*Ne myaso ne rybo*’ (neither meat nor fish); that is how Paul I, tsar of Russia from 1796 to 1801, labelled the west Ukrainian Greek Catholics. However, this description could apply to all Ukrainians who were not Orthodox, because the Romanov authorities made little nuance when it came to different identities. Apart from special categories such as Jewish or Baltic Protestant, the Western subjects of the Empire were either Orthodox or Catholic, Russian or Pole. Since the Ukrainians were in between Poland and Russia, they were characterized as ‘neither fish nor fowl’, to put it in normal English idiom. This viewpoint also implies that Paul I saw Orthodox Ukrainians as ‘Russian’ (Wilson 2009, 40).

In the Russian Empire, a state with more than one hundred ethnic groups, there was a so-called “ethnic hierarchy”. Thus, this meant that, in the eyes of the tsarist authorities, not all the ethnicities had equal rights; they were ranked and although this hierarchy was unofficial, it was very meaningful to tsarist policy and perception (Kappeler 2003a, 162). Of great importance in the Russian Empire, was loyalty to the dynasty: it was a criterion that determined the place of a people within the hierarchy. In the seventeenth century, so in fact before the Russian Empire, the Ukrainians were regarded by the tsarist government as unreliable Cossacks. Since the Cossacks were seen, to some extent, as inhabitants of the

steppe, they had a reputation of being rebels and potential traitors. Obviously, this did not work in favour of the position of the Ukrainians and the negative viewpoint was only bolstered when the Hetman of Ukraine, Ivan Mazepa, turned against the Russians at the beginning of the eighteenth century. From then on, Mazepa was represented in Russia as a prototypical traitor; as a result, a part of the Ukrainians were seen by the imperial center as disloyal separatists or Mazepists (*Mazepintsy*) (Ibid., 162-63).

In addition, Russians also think of Ukrainians as lacking seriousness. It was in the nineteenth century that Russians started to perceive Ukraine as a laughable place and the Little Russians as burlesque, or even a parody of Russians. Also in Russian literature of the time, Ukrainians were presented as friendly but not-too-smart and clownish characters (Kappeler 2003b, 43). Aleksandr Pushkin, for instance, described Ukrainians as “the singing and dancing tribe” (but in fact he was quoting Catherine the Great (Shkandrij 2001, 111)).

It was also in the course of the nineteenth century that the Russians started to perceive the majority of the Ukrainian people as *khokhly* (or *khokhol* in singular form): prototypes of uncivilized peasants. A reason for this development was that Ukrainians became to be seen as a regional variant of the Russians, which meant that Ukrainians were no longer included in the ethnic hierarchy. Instead, the Ukrainian people were considered as peasant people ruled by the Russian elite. Besides, many Ukrainians were dependent on the Polish nobility, which only confirmed the image of Ukrainians as peasant people (Kappeler 2003a, 168). It should be noted that the term *khokhol* entailed a sense of harmlessness; Ukrainians, or Little Russians, were now usually regarded as loyal, and as I described above, this was beneficial for a people’s place in the hierarchy of ethnic groups. However, Ukrainian language, culture and ethnos were still not viewed with respect. The opposite was true: they were not accorded independent status. Ukrainian, for instance, was regarded as a dialect (*narechie*), whereas Russian was listed as a language (*yazyk*). Thus, Ukrainians were derided when referred to as *khokhly*, and combated when depicted as *mazepintsy* (Ibid., 172-73).

This was not without consequences. In the chapter on imagology I argued that although images of nations are constructs, the spectant can have actual influence on the self-perception of the spectated. This was very much the case with the Russian representations of Ukrainians in the nineteenth century. Representing the Ukrainians as *khokhly* resulted in many Ukrainians adopting and internalizing “the image of an uncultivated, inferior peasant people” (Ibid., 174). Joining the advanced society of the Russians was the only way for those Ukrainians to overcome their inferiority complex. In practice this meant that Ukrainians made

careers in Russia, which led to partial Russification. This did not mean that all of those social climbers became Russians. It would be more appropriate to speak of a situational identity: loyalty to the state was demanded, just as adaptation to the Russian language and culture, but it was not necessary to acquire an exclusively Russian identity (Ibid., 174-75).

ζ

The attitude towards Ukraine is still ambivalent in post-Soviet Russia. On the one hand, one encounters Yeltsin's perspective that I reproduced in the previous section, which implies that Ukraine is considered not only Russia's dearest friend, but also that "Ukrainians are the same as we are," as Yeltsin formulated it. This perspective is reflected in the 1997 Russia-Ukraine treaty, in which it is unambiguously stated that Russia and Ukraine are equal sovereign states. Thus, by signing the treaty Russia recognized Ukrainian statehood. On the other hand, in contemporary Russia (or at least in 2009 when Wilson made his observation), many Russians seem reluctant to completely acknowledge the existence of a Ukrainian *nation* and insisted on a comment in the treaty saying that it was based on the historically close links and the good relations between the people of Ukraine and Russia (Wilson 2009, 307).

This reasoning demonstrates, I argue, the irony in the post-Soviet Russian imaging of Ukraine: it is because Ukraine is seen as a brother state that many Russians seem to feel awkward with the idea of Ukraine as an independent nation-state. Ukraine is seen as similar to Russia, but it seems, nevertheless, that Ukraine is perceived as being not on an equal level with Russia; it runs, I think, like a common thread through the history of Russian representations of Ukraine. Historian Zenon Kohut provides valuable insight for the understanding of the Russian ambivalent attitude towards Ukraine. Ukraine is considered to be part of Russia in historical, cultural, and spiritual terms, Kohut (2003) writes, and he adds: "So pervasive has been the myth of Russo-Ukrainian unity that any attempt at asserting a Ukrainian identity has been viewed by many Russians as treason or foreign intrigue" (57). Kohut thus seems to suggest that asserting a Ukrainian identity would be an infringement of Russian identity. Consequently, this is where the framework of imagology comes in – as I discussed in the previous chapter, self-perception is never far away when representing another culture. In this particular case, the image of Ukraine seems important for Russia's own identity.

However, as I mentioned above, the ambivalence in the way Ukrainians are perceived

is still there in post-Soviet Russia: Ukrainians are not accepted as equals, both socially and culturally speaking, and it is disputed if Ukraine is an independent national state. In 2003 Kappeler noticed that, despite all modernization, Ukrainians are still thought of as *khokhly*: uncultivated peasant people (181). But like I stated, this goes hand in hand with the fact that most Russians consider the Ukrainians as *malorossy*, a part of the Russian nation.

Disloyal Ukrainians: from Mazepintsy to Banderovtsy

At the end of the nineteenth century, the stereotype of the traitorous Mazepists was reinvigorated in order to relegate representatives of the Ukrainian national movement (Kappeler 2003a, 164). In the previous chapter on imagology I mentioned that national characterizations can sometimes be consciously constructed. In this case the image already existed, so it is not constructed as such; however, an image from earlier times is consciously *evoked* and serves a certain goal. Although this image of the traitorous Ukrainian was indeed partly evoked to delegitimize Ukrainian representatives, there were more reasons for the descent of Ukrainians in the hierarchy: the Ukrainian national movement presented its political demands for the first time. In addition, it was believed that the Ukrainians had established close ties with the Poles, who were seen as the embodiment of traitors since the uprising of 1863 (Ibid.).

It was also during Soviet times that the Ukrainians held an ambivalent status. Under Stalin, it was the Ukrainian proximity to Russia that prompted very sensitive reactions against suspected disloyalty and nationalism; also in the seventies Soviet policy was repressive toward Ukraine. This was due to the fact that the image of Ukrainians as *Mazepintsy* revived, but this time in the form of *Petlyurovtsy* and *Banderovtsy* (Ibid., 181); terms that are derived from the names of Simon Petlyura and Stepan Bandera who were both Ukrainian nationalist leaders: Petlyura in the first years after the Russian Revolution, Bandera at the time of the Second World War. The term *Petlyurovtsy* circulated in the 1930s; politburo documents, as Rory Finnin has shown, blamed kulak-*Petlyurovtsy* for hindering grain requisitions (cited in Ostapenko 2015).

Stepan Bandera remains a controversial figure up to the present day: for some he is a national hero and a liberator – especially in Western Ukraine where streets have been named

after him – whereas for others he is a Nazi collaborator (Marples 2006, 555). It was exactly this Nazi aspect that was deployed as an effective tool by Soviet propaganda. It was actually true that the Bandera faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN-B) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) – to which Bandera was also affiliated – committed major crimes during World War II (Struve 2014). The OUN-B and the UPA attempted to remove all non-Ukrainians from a future Ukrainian state, and indeed, for a certain period they collaborated with Germans with the aim of achieving this objective.

Nevertheless, Soviet propaganda propagated a very distorted image with the aim of tackling the “Ukrainian fascists” of the UPA in Western Ukraine, a struggle that began in 1944. During the following decades it became a struggle against Ukrainian nationalism in general. Thus, the Soviet discourse was not intended to provide historical understanding; it was employed to counteract the Ukrainian attempts to gain independence. Also, the representation of the Ukrainians as fascists legitimized the cruel suppression of the Ukrainian opposition against the Soviet occupation of Western Ukraine in 1944. It was also after the war that the propagandistic attacks against the actual or alleged Ukrainian fascists can be understood in the light of the Soviet Union’s second foundational myth (the first foundational myth had the October Revolution and the civil war as its center), namely the triumph over fascism in the Great Patriotic War (1941 – 1945, Struve 2014).

A recurring element in Soviet propaganda against the Ukrainian nationalists was the notion that the “Ukrainian fascists”, together with the Germans, had invaded the Soviet Union – moreover, those Ukrainians would have served as the German hangmen during the German occupation of Ukrainian territories (Ibid.). Likewise, in a speech from 1945, Nikita Khrushchiov referred to the “Ukrainian-German fascists” as “snakelike, slavish dogs of the Nazi hangmen” (Weiner 2012, 168).

After the Second World War, all Ukrainian nationalists could be represented as *Banderovtsy*, regardless of whether they were ideologically associated with Bandera. *Banderovtsy* were synonymous with ‘anti-Soviet’ Ukrainians and Soviet propaganda presented them as ultranationalist, extremist, and bourgeois (Ostapenko 2015). Ukrainian nationalists were thus presented as servants of the German fascists in the attempts to overthrow the Soviet Union, but also in crimes against the Ukrainian people (Struve 2014). Consequently, *Banderovtsy* were described – as David Marples has pointed out – as “the ‘worst traitors’ to their homeland”, and not only as collaborators with Nazis but also with ‘Anglo-American imperialists’ in the period of the Cold War (cited in Ostapenko 2015).

Finally, as I mentioned previously, the image of the *Banderovtsy* can be seen as a continuation of the Soviet campaign against the *Petlyurovtsy* before World War II, or even as a continuation of the image of Ukrainians as *Mazepintsy*.

Conclusions

Thus, images of Ukrainians were always rather complex. In the Russian Empire of the nineteenth century there were, on the one hand, the Ukrainian peasant masses who were presented by the tsarist government and the Russian public as charming, harmless, and also picturesque because of their songs and dances. However, another image of this part of the Ukrainian people was more widespread: the image of stupid, uncultivated *khokhly*. And then there were the *malorossy*, those Ukrainians who made their way into Russian society by making a career. They were considered as part of the Russian people. However, I argue that Ukrainian culture was always perceived as being of lesser value, even when Ukrainians integrated into Russian society. The way the Russians viewed the Ukrainians was a typical case of what is referred to in imagology as an ethnocentric stance: one's own culture is used as a point of reference when perceiving other cultures, paired with the belief that one's own ethnicity and culture is superior to alien cultures (Zacharasiewicz 2007, 2).

Indeed, in Russian society of the nineteenth century there were few who could understand those Ukrainians who wanted to establish national associations and parties to create an autonomous Ukrainian high culture. According to the logic of the ethnocentric stance, in Russian society the idea prevailed that the Ukrainians had a provincial, peasant culture, which differed greatly from what was perceived as the great Russian culture (Kappeler 2003a, 175). Those who thought that the Ukrainians were tools of the Polish national movement or of Austrian foreign policy viewed them as *mazepintsy*; in other words, a people who were dangerous and disloyal to the dynasty. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the view was sometimes expressed that the "Ukrainophiles" could be a danger to the unity of the Russian Empire (Ibid., 175-76). After the Second World War, this stereotype of the disloyal Ukrainian revived, but this time in the form of the disloyal and fascist *Banderovets*.

Finally, it should be clear that the Ukrainians were not constantly discriminated and exploited, nor were they bound to the Russians by perpetual friendship. Admittedly, there were elements of exploitation and cultural discrimination in the relationship between the tsarist center and the Ukrainian periphery. However, Ukraine was seen as part of the Russian motherland and the discrimination was not directed at Ukrainian citizens as such. On the other hand, it was still the case that being loyal and adjusting to Russian culture paved the way for

chances and advancement in Russian society. Also later, in the Soviet Union of Krushchev's time, it was – for a short period – possible for Ukrainians to work in the government and the party (Ibid., 176-81). The post-Soviet Russian image of Ukraine remained complex and ambivalent: although, or maybe because, the Ukrainians were still seen as Slavic brothers, many Russians seemed to feel awkward with the existence of an independent Ukrainian nation.

Chapter III

Contemporary Russian representations of Ukraine

The current chapter is devoted to my own empirical research into the contemporary representations of Ukraine that circulate on Russian news websites. All the discussed articles were published between December 2013 – when the Ukrainian crisis had begun – and June 2017; the moment I concluded my research. In other words, all articles were published at the time of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. This chapter follows the same structure as the previous chapter: it looks at what I consider to be the three most dominant narratives on Ukraine in the past, but also today: Ukrainians as the ‘brotherly people’ (the first section of this chapter), Ukrainians as the ‘lesser nation’ (the second section) and Ukraine as a fascist, *Banderovskij* state (the third and final section).

One people: Ukrainians and Russians as part of the same family

Given the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, one might expect that Ukrainians are not presented as Slavic Brothers anymore, or as “the same as we are,” to use Yeltsin’s phrasing once again. However, it is an unshakable narrative; Ukrainians are still perceived this way today. A widely used wording to describe the relation between Russians and Ukrainians is that they are “один народ” (one people).⁴ Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said unambiguously: “Russians and Ukrainians are one people”⁵ (Чинкова 2016); former head of the FSB Nikolay Patrushev declared that Ukraine and Russia may be divided at the present moment – the inhabitants of the two countries are still one people (Христова 2016). Also, Deputy of the State Duma Natal’ya Poklonskaya states: “Decent, honest, sincere and religious people understand that the conflict is artificial, and that the conflict is created in order to divide the people of Ukraine and Russia. But we are one people”⁶ (Кочетова 2016).

⁴ Translations are my own.

⁵ Русские и украинцы - это один народ.

⁶ Люди порядочные, честные, искренние, верующие понимают, что конфликт — искусственный, что он создаётся для того, чтобы разобщить народы Украины и России. А мы — один народ.

Furthermore, to make her argument more convincing, Poklonskaya points at their shared history: Vladimir the Great, she says, baptized “us” in the same baptismal font. Poklonskaya believes that the Ukrainians and the Russians (and the Belarusians) will be a “братский народ” (brotherly people) forever, and that other options are unthinkable (Ibid.). It is significant, I think, that Poklonskaya calls the Ukrainian conflict *artificial*; she seems to suggest that the conflict is caused by external factors.

The Rostov-on-Don edition of the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* also publishes an article full with “fraternal” comments on the Ukrainians. This picture for instance, at the top of the article, is significant:



Figure 1. Protesters carry a banner reading, “Odessa (mother), Rostov (father). We are with you.” (<http://www.rostov.kp.ru/daily/26201/3088610/>, 4 Mar. 2014)

The text on the banner says: “Odessa (mother), Rostov (father). We are with you.” Thus, this is a clear-cut example of over-‘intimatizing’ the relations with Ukraine; a tendency that is not new, as I demonstrated in the chapter on the history of Russian representations of Ukraine. I pointed out that Russians tend to use metaphors of brotherhood and family – the protesters presented here, needless to say, continue this trend.⁷ Moreover, in the upper-left corner of this picture, one sees another banner that states, “Russia does not abandon *its own*” (italics mine,

⁷ As becomes clear in this *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* article, not only Russians but also Ukrainians were present at this demonstration that took place in Rostov Oblast.

Степанов 2014). This statement is fully in line with what may be called the ‘family narrative’: it declares that Russia views Ukrainians as “свои” (its own/its own people); in other words, Ukrainians are presented as very much part of Russian identity.

This brings me to another observation. The discipline of imagology states that hetero-images differ from auto-images (Neumann 2009, 275) – my case study suggests that the image of the Other can be very similar or almost identical to the image of the Self: Ukrainians and Russians are regarded as one people. In addition, it is telling that Ukraine and Russia are presented as inseparable in many Russian representations of Ukraine; it may be argued that this image serves a certain purpose. Neumann (2009, 276) already pointed out that national characterizations can be the result of biased perspectives that serve certain aims. In this case a tradition is being reinforced – as demonstrated earlier, presenting Ukraine as part of the Russian people is not a new phenomenon. It remains an open question, however, why this representation of Ukraine is now, in the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, brought to the fore again. A possible answer is that by emphasizing the ethno-cultural ties, Ukraine can be said to belong to Russia’s natural sphere of influences; by this reasoning, Ukraine is deprived of its sovereignty (Eitze and Gleichmann 2014, 4). Another, yet comparable, possible answer is that presenting Ukrainians as part of the Russian people is a way for Putin to justify his meddling in Ukraine (Plokyh 2016).

Also Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox church, points out the similarities between Russians and Ukrainians. He states: “Russians and Ukrainians were one people, who by force of circumstances were separated into different houses. [...] we are still people who are united by a single faith, a single history and common values”⁸ (Калегина 2017). Patriarch Kirill, the article mentions, asked the media – when covering Ukrainian matters – to do everything in order to make sure that feelings of dislike and a negative attitude towards the Ukrainian people will not arise in the hearts of the people (Ibid.). Thus, history often appears to be used as an argument for the similarity between Ukraine and Russia. By the same token, the idea of Kiev as ‘the mother of all Russian cities’ is still evoked – Musorgskiy incorporated it, as I demonstrated earlier, in his *Pictures at an Exhibition*; President Putin still holds this belief today. He proclaims: “We are one with the Ukrainian people. Kiev is the mother of all

⁸ Русские и украинцы были одним народом, который в силу обстоятельств разошёлся по разным квартирам. [...]мы остаёмся людьми, которые объединяются единой верой, единой историей и едиными ценностями.

Russian cities. We cannot be without each other”⁹. Putin evokes this old idea of Kiev as the mother of all Russian cities in order to say something bigger; he uses it as evidence that Russians and Ukrainians belong to each other, and therefore should not be separated. Besides, this is yet another example of over-‘intimatizing’ the relations with Ukraine. Putin’s statement – we cannot be without each other – is obviously not a neutral way of speaking for a politician. Rather, it is an utterance that two lovers would make about each other.

Even in sources in which Ukraine is negatively portrayed, one may find sentences that depict Ukraine as similar to Russia. Russian writer Zakhar Prilepin writes in a column for *Izvestiya*: “The Russian people must fully realize with whom the militia of Novorossiia¹⁰ is dealing [...]. *We look at our own mirror image that broke free to live a free and riotous life*”¹¹ (italics mine, Прилепин 2015). Before Prilepin makes this statement, though, he portrayed Ukraine very negatively (I will discuss this in more detail in the next subchapter). Given this, it makes it all the more remarkable that this part of Ukraine is delineated as “our own mirror image.” However, one gets the impression that Prilepin is speaking in political – instead of cultural – terms: the Russians should not think that this region belongs rightfully to Ukraine, is what Prilepin seems to suggest, we look at our “mirror image”; thus, at Russia. I would argue, in other words, that Prilepin is echoing Putin (see footnote 10) when he uses the term Novorossiia; Prilepin depicts this region of Ukraine as Russia’s lands, as a region that somehow separated from Russia and has taken on a life of its own. Indeed, as argued by Beller (2007, 4), once images arose, they determine our way of seeing.

The views of political scientist Nikita Danyuk completely correspond to the image of Ukraine that I discuss in this section. Danyuk states that Ukrainians are not just a brotherly people (братский народ); Ukrainians and Russians are, according to him, one people. Also, Danyuk believes that the thesis “Ukraine is not Russia”¹² is wrong.¹³

To close this section, and to make my argument more convincing, I will briefly

⁹ Мы - один с Украиной народ. Киев - мать городов русских. Мы не сможем друг без друга.

(*Life*, “Во время обращения Владимира Путина зал встал и прервал его овациями,” 18 марта 2014)

¹⁰ In spring 2014, shortly after the annexation of Crimea, President Putin started to use the term New Russia, or Novorossiia, to indicate the lands in Southeastern Ukraine. Putin claimed this region was and is historically part of Russia. Novorossiia as a term had been used for a short period at the end of the eighteenth century/beginning of the nineteenth century, after Catherine the Great had conquered this region (Aron 2014, 19).

¹¹ Русские люди должны во всей полноте осознать, с кем имеют дело ополченцы Новороссии [...]. Мы смотрим на свое же вырвавшееся на волю и зажившее вольной, буйной жизнью зеркальное отражение.

¹² Украина — не Россия

¹³ *Правда.Ру*, “Политолог: Другой альтернативы, кроме как быть с Россией, у Украины нет,” 24 сентября 2016.

mention other sources in which Ukraine is presented as part of the Russian nation. The title of this *Pravda.ru* article, for instance, is telling: “Russia and Ukraine will become a great holy Rus’ once again”¹⁴ (Артамонов 2017). As I mentioned in the chapter on Russian images of Ukraine from earlier times, Rus’ is a historical term used to denote the entire East Slavic Region. Thus, the title of this article suggests that Ukraine and Russia should become part of an entity in which the two countries exist next to each other as part of a larger whole. In other words, I argue that this title disregards the distinctive features of Ukraine and Russia; they are so similar that they might as well become one state. Another article even asserts that Russians and Ukrainians have the same DNA. The article presents the results of an allegedly serious research and draws the conclusion that when it comes to DNA, “there are no distinctions between us and the Ukrainians. We are genetically one people”¹⁵ (Коробатов 2015). This statement fits perfectly in what I called the family narrative; Russia and Ukraine, just like twins, share the same DNA. Also, Russian boxer Aleksandr Shlemenko says he believes there is no division (разделение) between a Ukrainian and a Russian, “это один народ” (it is one people).¹⁶

However, some nuance is required in this discussion: stating that Ukrainians and Russians are one people does not necessarily mean that all the distinctions between them are neglected. The following statement by President Putin clarifies this position: “[...] Russians and Ukrainians are one people, one ethnos in any case, with their own, of course, singularity. [...] with their own cultural characteristics, but with a shared history, a shared culture, with common spiritual roots. Whatever happens, in the end Russia and Ukraine are, one way or another, doomed to a joint future.”¹⁷ Thus, although Putin states that the Russians and the Ukrainians are one people, he also points at the differences between the two people. Nevertheless, in Putin’s view, Russia and Ukraine are bound to each other because they have so much in common. In other words, the similarities are – at least for Putin – more dominant than the differences.

¹⁴ Россия и Украина вновь станут великой святой Русью.

¹⁵ А с украинцами у нас нет различий. Мы с ними генетически один народ.

¹⁶ *Life*, “Боец Шлеменко поддержал Олейника в решении надеть футболку с Путиным,” 22 ноября 2014.

¹⁷ [...] русские и украинцы - это один народ, один этнос во всяком случае, со своим, конечно, своеобразием. [...] со своими культурными особенностями, но с общей историей, с общей культурой, с общими духовными корнями. Чего бы ни происходило, в конечном итоге Россия и Украина так или иначе обречены на совместное будущее.

(*Российская газета*, “Стенограмма выступления Владимира Путина на ПМЭФ,” 19 июня 2015.)

NB *Rossiyskaya gazeta* (*Российская газета*) is in fact not in the corpus of newspapers I use for this thesis, but since *Rossiyskaya gazeta* is the state-owned official newspaper of the Russian government (Meylakhs 2011, 242), it is legitimate to use it here.

Ukraine, the lesser nation: weak, insane, and backward

Another very common narrative about Ukraine, the findings of my research suggest, is that Ukraine is a backward country; Ukraine and the Ukrainians are ridiculed in every possible way. In this section I will provide examples that are exemplary of the ways in which Ukrainians are represented as ‘a lesser nation’ on Russian news websites.

This seems opposed to what I explained above – the family narrative, with an emphasis on what Ukraine and Russia have in common. In the chapter on imagology I mentioned that contradictory images can indeed be observed in the way a nation is depicted, but they might be understood as two sides of the same coin (Leerssen 2007, 29). At the end of this section I will attempt to answer the question if this is also the case with these two opposing images of Ukraine.

The notorious term *khokhol* (or *khokhly* in plural form) is the first word that comes to mind when one mentions that Russian sources depict Ukrainians as backward people; it is a derogatory term for Ukrainians, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, a term that was in vogue in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, Ukrainians are still sporadically referred to with the word *khokhly* on Russian news websites.¹⁸ Also, sometimes one may encounter articles accompanied by images showing the typical *khokhol* haircut.¹⁹ Nevertheless, I would not argue that *khokhol* is still a common way to refer to the Ukrainians. In fact, website visitors tend to employ the term more often in their comments on news articles,²⁰ than the authors of those articles themselves.

I will discuss in more detail one article in which Ukrainians are called *khokhly*; not because the word itself is used a lot, but because it is just another example of a way to ridicule the Ukrainians.

The author of a column for the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* constantly refers to the Ukrainians as *khokhly*. It should be noted that the author himself is born in Ukraine. However, it may be argued that it makes his bashing of Ukraine all the more convincing. Moreover, it makes it ‘allowable’ for the author to write such insulting comments on the Ukrainians; one

¹⁸ See, for example: Прилепин 2015; Новикова 2015; Носовский 2014

¹⁹ See, for example: *Правда.Ру*, “Украина у дверей Евросоюза: кто последний тушит свет?” 8 июня 2017 or Сапожникова 2014

²⁰ See for example the comments to: Герасимов 2016; Пономарев 2017; Савченко 2017; *Life*, “В группе Quest Pistols ответили на обвинение в нацизме из-за тату,” 6 августа 2015; *Life*, “Украина стянула к границе с Крымом установки ‘Град’ и комплексы ‘Оса’, 10 июля 2014; *Life*, “Украинские военные пишат на ракетах ‘Ураган’ ‘Сдохните, твари!’” 5 февраля 2015

gets the impression that a Ukrainian-born author is ‘used’ to carry out this filthy task.

The title of the column: “*Khokhly*, we are the most complete idiots in the world!”²¹ Throughout the column the author keeps writing in the first-person plural, and he maintains a cynical tone; for example, when he writes that the Ukrainians – or *khokhly* as the author calls them – may congratulate themselves (Жилин 2014). Then what follows is an exposition of how high the level of idiocy is in Ukraine. Less corruption and less oligarchs were the slogans which led us to the Euromaidan, the author writes, but nearly nothing has changed and the corrupt politicians are still in power. Thereafter the Ukrainians are further ridiculed and presented as stupid, ignorant people: the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* columnist states that where other nations and peoples have brains, the Ukrainians only have the conviction that Putin is to blame for everything (Ibid.). Besides, the word *khokhly* is used four times in the article, and that even excludes the title. It should be noted that this image of the stupid Ukrainians is thus presented in the same newspaper – namely, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* – that also gave space to voices that presented Ukrainians and Russians as the same people. *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* is not an exception: other sources that I already mentioned in the section on the family narrative are equally useful for this section.

Life.ru, for instance. The news website devotes an article to a Ukrainian tourist that tried to steal as much as possible from his Egyptian hotel: soap, shampoo, “a mountain of dishes” (гору посуды), several bags of food and the bidet faucet (Купчинская 2017). One wonders why this ‘news’ has appeared on a news website. It seems probable that the opportunity is being taken here to ridicule the Ukrainians and to portray them as uncivilized people. The tone of the article is such that one indeed gets the impression that fun is being made of the Ukrainian in question: the stolen goods are called “souvenirs,” and the Ukrainian is described with the adjective *хозяйственный* (economic).

As I explained in the chapter on imagology, it is valuable to find out what the reception of a text is (Leerssen 2007, 28). Under the article about the Ukrainian tourist there are several comments by website visitors; the comment “a real Ukrainian,”²² followed by three exclamation marks, is the most popular with 33 likes. Thus, this representation of a Ukrainian is met with relatively much approval and confirmed to a certain extent by the audience of this text. A little Russian flag next to the comment denotes that the comment is written by a Russian. However, another site visitor – also from Russia – adds nuance to the

²¹ Хохлы, мы самые крутые кретины в мире!

²² Настоящий украинец!!!

discussion by arguing that “Russians can do that too!”²³ However, it must be said that this critical remark is rather an exception: a majority of the comments support the argument of the article (see the comments posted to Купчинская 2017). Moreover, the most popular comment states that, as I demonstrated, the behaviour of the Ukrainian tourist is typical for Ukrainians. In other words, this image of a Ukrainian – “economic” and not too civilized – resonates with the audience of *life.ru*.

Another article on *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*'s website is full of sarcasm and Ukraine is constantly being mocked. The article starts with stating that currently in Ukraine – or the most “free” country in the world, as the author sarcastically calls Ukraine (inverted commas not mine) – teachers are being arrested for secretly supporting Russia (Голованов 2016). As stated in the article, teachers are also accused for having sympathy for the USSR and for publishing caricatures of Poroshenko. Subsequently, the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* article predicts the future of Ukraine: “*Nezalezhnaya* set off to a bright European future along the lines of “purges” and “mass denunciations”²⁴ (Ibid.). Several observations can be deduced from this sentence.

Firstly, Ukraine is called *Hezalezhnaya*, which is derived from the Ukrainian word for independent (Kappeler 2003b, 43). Kappeler has argued that Russian media frequently use the word *Hezalezhnaya* to make a mockery of Ukrainian independence (Ibid.). He noticed this in 2003, but my research shows that the term is still widely used today (I will discuss other examples below). Thus, referring to Ukraine as *Hezalezhnaya* is yet another way to ridicule Ukraine. Secondly, by pointing at how limited freedom of thought is, Ukraine is here again portrayed as a backward country. The question if those Ukrainian teachers were indeed arrested is not of importance: even if it is not a case of disinformation it is obvious, I think, that the *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* author makes use of the opportunity to depict Ukraine in such a negative light. The irony – a “bright” European future – brings me to this conclusion. Thirdly and finally, not only Ukraine but also Europe is made fun of in the above quoted sentence, or rather in the whole article. Given the Ukrainian conflict, in which Ukraine finds itself more than ever caught between Russia and Europe, it could be useful for Russia to represent Europe in such a way; a European future is a dark future, is what the article clearly says. Furthermore, when representing a nation, as I stated in the chapter on imagology, self-perception is never far away. It is in the context of the representing discourse in which the image of the Other takes shape (Beller and Leerssen 2007, xiii-xiv). Therefore I would argue

²³ Русские тоже так умеют!

²⁴ В светлое европейское будущее Незалежная отправилась по шпалам «чисток» и «массовых доносов».

that, by representing Ukraine and Europe in such a particularly negative light, Russia is – so to speak – the silent winner; the reader is supposed to think that Russia’s society is more humane and sophisticated than the Ukrainian society.

As I mentioned above, referring to Ukraine as *Hezalezhnaya* is a way to mock Ukraine’s independence. What follows are other examples of contexts in which the term is used.

“Somalia *Hezalezhnaya*: Ukraine has become a country of pirates,”²⁵ is the title of another *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* article. The author states that Somali ships often dock in the ports of Ukraine and that the Ukrainian jurisdiction “committed a suicidal pirate act”²⁶ because it confiscated a vessel under the flag of Tanzania that entered the Crimea. Also, mention is made of lying Ukrainian media, which adds to the overall image of a backward, lawless country (Гришин 2017). Another article headlines with “What awaits *hezalezhnaya* in the year 2017,”²⁷ followed by a picture of a tramp, begging in the snow for money (Орловская 2017). The message should be clear; there is only doom and gloom in the offing. The article furthermore declares that “in the 25 years of its independent existence, Ukraine managed to lose and, in fact, destroy its industrial base, and also proved unable to become an agrarian power”²⁸ (Ibid.). Thus, it may be argued that Ukrainian independence is indirectly ridiculed by using the word *hezalezhnaya* – which the article did in the headline – and unambiguously put to shame by the citation quoted above. Although we are not dealing here with the narrative that depicts Ukraine as part of the Russian family, it seems reasonable to state that the family narrative is evoked nonetheless; Ukraine as an independent country is presented as a hopeless case. The suggestion is raised, I argue, that this level of hardship in Ukraine is the consequence of its divorce from Russia, or, rather, the independence of Ukraine reveals the country’s backwardness.

Indeed, using the word *hezalezhnaya* more often refers to the problems Ukraine has as an independent state. For instance, in a *Life* article with the headline “Europe will teach Ukraine for € 40 million how to replace gas from Russia by hay,”²⁹ it is stated that “[...] in *hezalezhnaya* itself there have long been problems with electricity [...]”³⁰ (Потоцкий 2017). In this case, again, the conveyed argument is that Ukraine faces difficulty in being

²⁵ Сомали Незалежная: Украина стала страной-пиратом

²⁶ совершило самоубийственный пиратский акт

²⁷ Что ждет независимую в 2017 году

²⁸ Украина за 25 лет своего независимого существования успела растерять и, по сути, уничтожить свою индустриальную базу, не сумев стать и аграрной державой.

²⁹ Европа за €40 млн научит Украину, как заменить газ из России сеном

³⁰ [...] в самой Незалежной уже давно проблемы с электричеством [...]

independent; it is bad being without Russia, the ‘Big Brother’. Also, Ukrainian authorities like to show how independent they are from Moscow, according to experts consulted by *Life* (Ibid.). Such a statement fits, I think, to the narrative in which Ukrainian independence is ridiculed.

By the same token, in the *Izvestiya* column by writer Zakhar Prilepin that I discussed in the first section of this chapter, Ukraine is presented as a helpless child that needs support from, in this case, the United States and NATO (2015). Prilepin compares the present-day situation to the time of World War II: “But at that time there was no Obama who promised the *Banderovtsy* arms supplies, NATO instructors did not follow them with sound advice and no goodwill ambassadors came to them with biscuits and carrots”³¹. A nation that needs external support is, once again, the image of Ukraine that emerges here. Although Prilepin does not use the word *nezalezhnaya*, one could argue that Prilepin’s utterance belongs to the same narrative: Ukrainian independence is – again with bitter sarcasm – caricatured, albeit indirectly.

In the same *Izvestiya* column, Ukrainians are presented as mentally disturbed (Прилепин 2015). Again, this seems, and probably is, very much opposed to the family narrative, the narrative that sees Ukrainians and Russians as the same people. Prilepin speaks of a “semi-delirium” (полубред) in which the Ukrainians have contemplated how Russia has appropriated Ukrainian statehood and culture in the past. In addition, at another point in the text, Prilepin argues that the mass behaviour of the Ukrainians could be described “in medical terms” – subsequently, he describes a person who is unstoppable for a while, due to exceptional rage (Ibid.). Thus, using the word semi-delirium in order to delineate the condition of the Ukrainians, and stating that their behaviour could be described in medical terms are, I argue, examples of portraying the Ukrainians as mentally amiss.

Also on *Life.ru*, Ukrainians are represented in a similar vein. A *Life* author claims that, due to the Ukrainian crisis, Ukrainians are joining sects *en masse*.³² A picture of people – half in trance, eyes and hands lifted upwards – is placed at the top of the article. According to the author, the number of sects is growing every day, and “millions of Ukrainians have already turned to another faith.” The unqualified statements, as well as the tone of the article indicates that we are not dealing here with a neutral news message. For example, “Against a backdrop

³¹ Но тогда к тому же никакой Обама не обещал бандеровцам поставок вооружений, инструкторы НАТО не бродили за ними по пятам с дельными советами и никакие послы доброй воли не приезжали к ним с печеньем и морковкой.

³² *Life*, “На фоне кризиса украинцы массово вступают в секты,” 13 декабря 2014

of a socio-economic disaster, a wave of pseudo-religious movements took Ukraine in its grip. In search of a true path, people who are exhausted by the problems practice exorcism, they sing prayers, and the “confessors” do not abhor taking the last money from their victims.”³³ Some of the songs, the author adds, are more like hysteria. Thus, one might argue that the mechanism that is at work here can be very well understood in imagological terms: an image of the Other, in this case the Ukrainians, is *constructed*; an image that is largely subjective. The Ukrainians are deliberately portrayed in a very negative light: the image that comes across is that of a crazy people, people who are out of their minds.

So far, it has thus been demonstrated that two seemingly opposed images of Ukraine circulate in Russian media: the image of a Ukraine that is part of the Russian family, and a backward Ukraine that is ridiculed in every possible way. A *Pravda.ru* article, that clearly belongs to the second narrative, openly questions the family narrative. The article deals with, as the title mentions, Ukrainians that “humiliate Russian tourists in Turkey.”³⁴ It is stated in the article that Ukrainians (as well as Georgians and Moldovans) “behave rude to Russians or simply refuse to communicate with them.”³⁵ Thus, the image that is conveyed is known by now: the image of the stereotypical, uncivilized Ukrainian.

Furthermore, as stated above, the family narrative is explicitly subverted; the *Pravda.ru* author calls Ukraine a “former “fraternal” republic” (inverted commas not mine). Placing the word fraternal in inverted commas indicates, obviously, that the author disagrees with the representation of Ukraine as a fraternal country. Or, to use imagological phrasing, the tradition of this national image is negated. The two common narratives about Ukraine interface in this article and the family narrative is undermined even more by the image of the boorish Ukrainian. A column in *Izvestiya* follows the same principle: Ukraine is negatively portrayed and called a “fraternal Slavic nation” and “Orthodox coreligionists” (Лимонов 2014); again, the inverted commas are in the original. The idea of the Ukrainians as brothers is subverted by an opposite narrative: there is dualism in the way Ukraine and Russia are presented: Russia is referred to as a strong country and the Russians are called “simple and kind” (простые и добрые); Ukraine, on the other hand, is depicted as a weak, insincere, and parasitic country (Ibid.).

³³ Волна псевдорелигиозных движений охватила Украину на фоне социально-экономической катастрофы. В поисках истинного пути измученные проблемами люди практикуют экзорцизм, поют молебны, а «духовники» не гнушаются забирать у своих жертв последние деньги.

³⁴ *Pravda.Ru*, “Украинцы издеваются и унижают русских туристов в Турции,” 04 мая 2017

³⁵ грубят россиянам или просто отказываются с ними общаться

Thus, in this section I presented different Russian stereotypes of Ukraine that are however all related in the sense that they portray Ukraine as the lesser nation. The family narrative, as argued earlier, depicts the Russians and Ukrainians as – so to speak – ‘we’: according to this narrative the two countries are thought of as belonging together, whereas in this section an opposite image was propagated, an image that depicts Ukrainians as the Other. Sarcasm and irony are often present in the examples that I provided in this section, which adds to the mocking of Ukraine – the nation is depicted as stupid, crazy, and uncivilized.

At the beginning of this section, I raised the question if those two images of Ukraine – the brother on the one hand, the backward nation on the other – can be seen as two sides of the same coin. I argue that calling Ukraine *Nezalezhnaya* can indeed be understood within the family narrative; the term is used to turn Ukrainian independence to ridicule, just because Ukraine is perceived as belonging to the Russian world. Nevertheless, I think it would be too far-fetched to see the two Russian narratives of Ukraine as two sides of the same coin. What I do argue, however, is that the views are not as opposed as they might seem to be at first glance. Although some of the discussed articles present the two images as genuine opposites, they do not necessarily exclude each other: Ukraine may be presented as Russia’s brother but it is a *little* brother, not on an equal level with Russia.

A statement by actor and artistic director of the Moscow Art Theatre Oleg Tabakov – used by *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* in one of their headlines – summarizes the narrative I discussed in this section: “They [the Ukrainians] are not very enlightened”³⁶ (Стрельникова 2015).

Ukraine as a nazi, fascist, or Banderovskiy state

Russian media tend to represent Ukrainians as fascists; it is another rather prevalent Russian narrative of Ukraine. Again, also this image can be found on the same Russian news websites that also propagate the family narrative. In fact, the fascist narrative and the family narrative may occur in the same article. At the beginning of this chapter I paraphrased former head of the FSB Nikolay Patrushev, who stated that Ukrainians and Russians are one people (Христова 2016). Patrushev declares, nonetheless, as it is written in the same article, that in Ukraine an extreme right-wing nationalist ideology is gaining strength, “as once in fascist

³⁶ Они и так не очень просветленные.

Germany” (Ibid.). This comparison is especially remarkable because it can apparently coexist with the view that Ukrainians are the same people as Russians.

The fascism narrative is often propagated by referring to the Ukrainians as *Banderovtsy* (or *Banderovets* in singular form), a term that is derived from – as I explained in the previous chapter – the name of Ukrainian nationalist leader Stepan Bandera. As mentioned, for some he is a national hero and a liberator whereas for others he is a Nazi collaborator (Marples 2006, 555). When Russian news websites use the word *Banderovtsy*, it is obvious that they refer to Bandera as a Nazi collaborator. The following examples will demonstrate this assertion and thereby show how contemporary Ukrainians are viewed within this framework.

A *Life* article, for instance, is devoted to school students who sang a song called “I am a *banderovets*” at their graduation.³⁷ The faces of the school students are blurred on the picture that accompanies the article. The article mentions that the school in question is “known for its special approach to learning. They try to form the children into so-called “nationally conscious personalities.” In order to achieve this, pupils study the feats of Ukrainian fascists [...].”³⁸ Yet, this article is relatively nuanced and mentions that quite a lot of Ukrainians disapproved of the performance. It is not impossible to find more examples of more nuanced understandings of the *Banderovtsy* discourse; *Life*, for instance, quoted “A Just Russia” politician Dmitriy Zakharov, who stated that those who killed Donbass children are not Ukrainians, but *Banderovtsy* (Беликов 2016). Thus, he makes a clear distinction between Ukrainians and those Ukrainians who he views as *Banderovtsy*.

However, nuance is missing in most articles. The contemporary Ukrainian authorities are referred to as *Banderovtsy*; *Pravda.ru* writes about the “[...] *Banderovtsy* from the Kiev junta regime”³⁹ and Ukraine is called a “neo-fascist state” (неонацистское государство).⁴⁰ The author of an *Izvestiya* column states that neo-Nazis in balaclavas seized power after the Euromaidan, and that in contemporary Ukraine there is a “*neobanderovski*y dictatorship in the public consciousness”⁴¹ (Бондаренко 2015). The author of another *Izvestiya* column – dedicated to the outcomes of 25 years of Ukrainian independence – speaks of a “gradual legalization of different forms of radical nationalist ideology, often openly of neo-Nazi and

³⁷ *Life*, “Украинские студенты выступили на выпускном с песней ‘Я — бандеровец,’” 31 мая 2015

³⁸ [...] известен своим особым подходом к обучению. Из детей пытаются сформировать так называемую «национально-осознанную личность». Для этого ученики изучают подвиги украинских фашистов [...]

³⁹ [...] бандеровцы из киевской хунты.

⁴⁰ *Pravda.Ru*, “Украина у дверей Евросоюза: кто последний тушит свет?” 8 июня 2017

⁴¹ [...] необандеровской диктатурой в общественном сознании.

neobanderovskiy stamp”⁴² (Пироженко 2016). Furthermore, he states that “*Banderovtsy* came out of the underground”⁴³ and have become legal in the political structures of Kiev. Interestingly, the author notes a “cultural-historical, value rupture with Russia”⁴⁴ after 2014 – thus after the first year after the Euromaidan. This statement echoes the family narrative that I described at the begging of this chapter; Russia and Ukraine shared a culture, history and the same values. In other words, it gives the impression that this author also once believed in the family narrative but that he had to reconsider his viewpoint after the boisterous events that led to the Ukrainian crisis. This assumption is confirmed when the author remarks that the Ukrainian state – against the wishes of a large mass of the Ukrainians – abandoned their “actual all-Russian history”⁴⁵ (Ibid.). This once again shows that sometimes there exists a thin line between the different images of Ukraine: the above discussed author presents a Ukraine that is neo-Nazi and *neobanderovskiy* on the surface, but a part of the Russian family at the core of its DNA.

This double-faced narrative is also expressed in another *Izvestiya* column: the author states that the political heirs of fascist dictatorships – that existed in Europe at the beginning of World War II – rule in Ukraine (Вассерман 2016). At the same time, however, the author claims that Ukraine is “an integral (with all its originality) part of the Russian nation.”⁴⁶ Thus, the two different narratives do not necessarily exclude each other: an author might believe that fascism is rampant in Ukraine but still consider Ukraine to be part of the Russian people. Or, to put it in imagological terms, this apparent discrepancy shows how complex the dynamics between hetero-images and self-images can be. As I argued before, my case demonstrates that hetero-images and self-images can partially coincide. Again, however, at the same time – and in the same source – the Other can also be imagined as an almost demonic counterpart.

An explanation for this contradiction might be that only those who are in power are considered to be neofascists, not the majority of the population itself. Political scientist Sergey Markov, for instance, says in an interview with *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* that a minority – represented by the population of the western regions of the country – has formed powerful nationalist groups of a neofascist type, who are trying to seize power and impose

⁴² [...] постепенная легализация разных форм национал-радикальной идеологии, зачастую откровенно неонацистского, необандеровского толка.

⁴³ Бандеровцы вышли из подполья [...]

⁴⁴ [...]культурно-исторический, ценностный разрыв с Россией [...]

⁴⁵ [...] реальной общерусской истории.

⁴⁶ [...]неотъемлемая (при всём своеобразии) часть русского народа [...]

their will on the majority of the population.⁴⁷ In other words, the neofascist elements in Ukraine are not representative of the entire nation.

Nevertheless, the great attention on Russian news websites focused on the legacy of Stepan Bandera – and on fascism in contemporary Ukraine in general – remains remarkable. To provide another example, *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* published a relatively long interview-article with the title “Why are they condoning Bandera in Ukraine?”⁴⁸ (ОВЧИННИКОВ 2016). The interviewer indirectly states that the Maidan protesters are *Banderovtsy* – he speaks of “The contemporary *Banderovtsy*, who are sitting on the Maidan [...]”⁴⁹ Also, the interviewer asks if Russia has raised the question about the “actual revival of Nazism on the territory of Western Ukraine.”⁵⁰ Historian Aleksandr Dyukov, the interviewee of this article, corrects him by saying that it is not correct to speak of a revival of Nazism; rather, Dyukov observes an ideology that relates to fascism. However, he immediately adds to this that the organization World Without Nazism⁵¹ recently published a thick volume about fascist threats in the world, in which it is stated – quite rightly, according to Dyukov – that Ukraine is exposed to this danger.

Thus, a tradition is being reinforced: the image of Ukrainians as *Banderovtsy* was – as I mentioned in the chapter on the history of Russian representations of Ukraine – prevailing during the Soviet Union (Kappeler 2003a, 181). It is thus not merely a Russian image, but a Soviet image of Ukraine as well. According to imagological thinking, the ongoing processes of translation and renarration adds persuasive power to the national stereotypes (Neumann 2009, 278). It should be reminded here that the Soviet image of the *Banderovtsy* was in its turn a reformation of the even older image of the *Mazepintsy* (Kappeler 2003a, 181).

⁴⁷ *Комсомольская правда*, “Федор Лукьянов, политолог: Февраль 2014-го в Киеве - копия октября 1993-го в России?” 20 февраля 2014

⁴⁸ Зачем на Украине обеляют Бандеру?

⁴⁹ Современные бандеровцы, сидящие на Майдане [...]

⁵⁰ [...]фактическом возрождении нацизма на территории Западной Украины.

⁵¹ Dyukov calls World Without Nazism (Мир без нацизма) an international organization. In fact, World Without Nazism is founded by the Kremlin-connected businessman Boris Spiegel. The organization has frequently discussed the actual or alleged right-wing extremism in the Baltic states and in Ukraine, but largely refrained from paying attention to right-wing extremism in the Russian Federation (Moser 2014, 148-49).

Conclusion

The main finding of this Master's thesis is that the current Ukrainian-Russian conflict did not fundamentally alter the Russian representations of Ukrainians. Furthermore, in this study I have highlighted what I consider to be the three most common Russian images of Ukraine of the past and demonstrated that they overlap with the contemporary representations.

Firstly, Ukrainians and Russians were and are still presented as one people; I called this the family narrative. The shared history of the two nations is often adduced as evidence of this assertion. There is a difference, however, in the way in which this narrative is conveyed today. In earlier times, such as the late nineteenth century, it seemed rather self-evident that Ukraine and Russia were the same entity; this view was exposed, for instance, because a clear distinction between the Ukrainian and the Russian nation was often absent in the expressions of writers and other artists. Also, the word *Russian* was used for Ukrainians as well. Similarly, both Russians and Ukrainians were denoted by the word *Rus'* in the seventeenth century. Nowadays, Ukrainians are still portrayed as part of the Russian nation; however, while in the past this perception was often implicit, today it is very explicitly mentioned; presenting the Ukrainians and the Russians as the same people seems an important point one wants to make.

Secondly, and paradoxically: in the past, as well as today, Ukraine is also portrayed as what I called 'the lesser nation'. One still encounters the pejorative, nineteenth-century term *khokhol* to refer to the Ukrainians, but more often in comments by website visitors underneath articles than in the articles themselves. However, the media that I have examined may often avoid the word *khokhol*, they ridicule the Ukrainians nonetheless. For example, Ukraine is frequently called *Hezalezhnaya*: a term that is used to make a mockery of Ukrainian independence. Ukraine is portrayed as a weak state that needs support from external factors in order to cope with their problems and difficulties. Furthermore, Russian online newspapers depict Ukrainians as idiots, as uncivilized and crazy – or even insane – people, which is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Russian image of Ukrainians as ignorant and clownish characters. Nowadays, in order to corroborate this image, authors often use cynicism and sarcasm in their articles.

Thirdly, authors of Russian online media that I have looked at tend to represent Ukraine as a neo-Nazi or fascist state, with *Banderovtsy* in power. Again, this way of

portraying Ukraine is not new; a tradition is reinforced. After Ukrainian leader Ivan Mazepa turned against the Russians at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a part of the Ukrainians were seen by the Russian imperial center as disloyal *Mazepintsy* with separatist tendencies. Similarly, Soviet propaganda portrayed Ukrainians as fascist *Banderovtsy*, after Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian nationalist leader from the World War II era. This image still exists today. The persuasive power of this representation – as well as of the two earlier described representations of Ukraine – lies in its recurrence over time, as imagological theory would argue. Even though some contemporary authors make a clear distinction between *Banderovtsy* and other Ukrainians, nuance is often missing: Ukraine is called a neo-fascist state, *Banderovtsy* are said to have become legal in the political structures of Kiev, the Maidan protesters are seen as *Banderovtsy*, fascism is presented as a threat to the Ukrainian nation, and it is being claimed that – just like once in fascist Germany – an extreme right-wing nationalist ideology is gaining strength in Ukraine.

I see here an analogy to the Soviet situation in which the image of the *Banderovtsy* was employed to counteract Ukrainian independence movements; since nowadays a part of Ukraine attempts to move away from the Russian sphere of influence, it may be argued that the image of *Banderovtsy* is again used in order to stop this development. This fascist narrative, in combination with the family narrative, results in a convincing message: Ukraine belongs to Russia, the more stable ‘big brother’.

Indeed, as I have shown in this thesis, sometimes there exists a thin line between the different images of Ukraine. I have discussed authors that portrayed Ukraine as a fascist state and at the same time as a part of the Russian nation. Also the family narrative – that presents Ukraine as part of ‘we’ – and the image of Ukraine as a lesser nation – that presents Ukraine as the Other – were not as opposed as they seem at first glance. The two narratives do not necessarily exclude each other: Ukraine may be presented as Russia’s brother, but, as I have demonstrated, it is a less successful little brother, not on an equal level with Russia. It is the common thread that runs through the history of Russian representations of Ukraine. Admittedly, one may find articles in which one of the three common narratives on Ukraine is explicitly undermined. However, just like in the past, also today the different narratives usually do not exclude each other; the narratives intertwine, or they exist next to each other.

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