Research Article

Aram Terzyan*

The Enemy Next Door: The Image of Russia in Georgian and Ukrainian Political Discourses Amid Conflicts Escalation

<https://doi.org/10.1515/openps-2021-0018>

received April 1, 2021; accepted April 30, 2021.

Abstract: This article presents an analysis of the evolution of Russia’s image representation in Georgian and Ukrainian political discourses amid Russian-Georgian and Russian-Ukrainian conflicts escalation. Even though Georgia’s and Ukraine’s troubled relations with neighboring Russia have been extensively studied, there has been little attention to the ideational dimensions of the confrontations, manifested in elite narratives, that would redraw the discursive boundaries between “Us” and “Them.” This study represents an attempt to fill the void, by examining the core narratives of the enemy, along with the discursive strategies of its othering in Georgian and Ukrainian presidential discourses through critical discourse analysis. The findings suggest that the image of the enemy has become a part of “New Georgia’s” and “New Ukraine’s” identity construction - inherently linked to the two countries’ “choice for Europe.” Russia has been largely framed as Europe’s other, with its “inherently imperial,” “irremediably aggressive” nature and adherence to illiberal, non-democratic values. The axiological and moral evaluations have been accompanied by the claims that the most effective way of standing up to the enemy’s aggression is the “consolidation of democratic nations,” coming down to the two countries’ quests for EU and NATO membership.

Keywords: Georgia, Ukraine, Russia, conflict escalation, enemy image, othering, discursive strategies

1 Introduction

The article focuses on the evolution of Russia’s image representation in Georgian and Ukrainian political discourses amid Russian-Georgian and Russian-Ukrainian conflicts escalation. The 2008 Russian occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as the 2014 annexation of the Crimea have generated huge backlash against Russia both across Georgia and Ukraine. This has found its expression in Georgian and Ukrainian political discourses, characterized by substantial othering of Russia and its representation as the biggest threat to both countries’ sovereignty, freedom, and even to liberal international order (Molchanov, 2015).

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

According to widely held beliefs Georgia’s and Ukraine’s othering of Russia has much to do with their “European choice” given that in European political discourse Russia is clearly identifiable ‘other’ (Neumann, 2013). This comes down to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s foreign policy concepts, that led to the establishment of an opposing ideology to the European one based on Russian ethnic nationalism, conservative values and the Russian Orthodox church. This new ideology and the increasingly anti-western rhetoric contribute significantly to substantial othering of Russia and its portrayal as Europe’s ‘other’ in European political thinking (Neumann, 1998). The European Committee of

*Corresponding author: Aram Terzyan, Eurasia Institutes, Glendale /Los Angeles, California, United States, E-mail: aramterzyan@gmail.com

the British House of Lords (2015) contend that Russia is increasingly defining itself as a rival to the EU with the creation of the Eurasian Union and possibly constructing a Eurasian identity (Stefansson, 2015: 20-21). Some students posit that the othering of Russia is necessarily an active part of the identity formation whereby Europe is being constructed and reconstructed (Neumann 1998: 3).

Clearly, Russia's fierce resistance to Georgia's and Ukraine's Europeanization has further fed the "clash of civilization" narrative, reinforcing its treatment as Europe's other in Georgian and Ukrainian political discourses. Not surprisingly, former Georgian and Ukrainian presidents Mikheil Saakashvili and Petro Poroshenko would contrast Russia's image with that of Europe, as a vivid manifestation of a confrontation between "the rule of law and the rule of fear" (Civil Georgia, 2010). Furthermore, Poroshenko would use the following narratives to emphasize Ukraine's departure from Russian the sphere of Russian political and cultural influence: "Farewell, unwashed Russia," "Farewell to you, our tender Misha, go back home to your wood of fairy tales," "Russian comrade, don't mess with Ukraine," "Away from Moscow! Europe now!" (Poroshenko, 2018a).

Nevertheless, this study avoids reductionism to the narratives of Russia's 'otherness' and provides a more holistic approach to accounting for the political rationale behind substantial othering of Russia in Georgian and Ukrainian discourses. It explores the discursive strategies that former Georgian and Ukrainian presidents Mikheil Saakashvili's and Petro Poroshenko's employed to distance 'Us' from 'Them'.

It borrows insights from the landmark study of Oddo (2011) that examines how 'Us' and 'Them' emerge as meaningful categories through the differential deployment of highly moralized lexical resources – especially highly moralized material processes and nominalizations (Oddo, 2011: 288).

It identifies the discursive construal of an Us/Them binary as the principal legitimation technique that rhetors use to juxtapose 'Our' overwhelmingly positive image with 'Their' rather negative image. Oddo (2011) contends that polarizing lexical resources constitute 'Us' and 'Them' as superordinate thematic categories that covertly legitimate war (Oddo, 2011: 287). Yet, this study suggests that, both in Georgian and Ukrainian discourses Us/Them polarization, along with the narratives underlying the othering of Russia have been simply employed to describe the situation from a normative perspective.

It addresses the following research question: What are the core narratives underlying the othering of Russia in Georgian and Ukrainian political discourses? It analyzes the representation of the enemy image of Russia in Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's (2004-2013) and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's (2014-2019) discourses, focusing specifically on the discursive strategies of demarcation between self and other.

The study relies on critical discourse analysis to explore what narratives the Georgian and Ukrainian presidents used for othering Russia. Critical discourse analysis rests on the notion that complex interrelations between discourse and society cannot be examined thoroughly, "unless linguistic and sociological approaches are combined" (Wodak and Weiss 2003: 7). Thus, it is necessary to establish a theoretical foundation that reconciles sociological and linguistic categories. Fairclough (1995) notes that "mainly in discourse that consent is achieved, ideologies are transmitted, and practices, meanings, values and identities are taught and learned" (Fairclough, 1995: 219). Given that in modern democracies power is exercised on a discursive level principally, it is essential to understand the various ways in which "power relations are imposed and exercised in language" (Tekin, 2010: 16).

Building on constructivist scholarship, the study follows John Gerard Ruggie in accepting that "constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in human life" (Ruggie, 1998: 856). Broadly speaking, constructivism is an approach to social analysis based on the following basic assumptions: (a) human interaction is not shaped by material factors, but primarily by ideational ones; (b) the most significant ideational factors in this context are "intersubjective" beliefs as shared collective understanding; and (c) these beliefs construct the actors' identities and interests (Jung, 2019: 2).

Elites are viewed as the key agents in constructing new identities, leading to the demarcation between the self and other (Stråth, 2008: 21). Political elites compete with one another to have their preferred national self-image become the national identity and define the state's interests (Clunan, 2009: 14). In doing so, they seek to enhance national self-esteem, which entails using value rationality to uphold or create a legitimate social order that institutionalizes values, norms, beliefs, and procedures that give them a positive self-image of their country (Clunan, 2009:14). It follows that foreign policy discourse is not only an expression of collective identity; It is also a process of constructing and reconstructing the self and the other, as well as identifying respective levels of difference and danger from others (Minesashvili, 2016:11-12).

The study relies on observations from political speeches, newspaper articles, official documents and interviews which provide a body of discourse. It places a special focus on the core political speeches of Mikheil Saakashvili and Petro Poroshenko, pertaining to their conceptions of self-enemy dichotomies and the prevailing characteristics of the enemy images of Russia.

2 Enemy image and othering in foreign policy: The relevance of Georgian and Ukrainian Cases

Constructivist and poststructuralist-driven studies presume that the portrayal of enemy images is an integral part of identity construction, and an actor's sense of self is unclear and incomplete until the otherness is defined (Tamaki, 2010: 29). Derrida (1993,) argues that "it is the political as such [...] that would no longer exist without the figure and without the determined possibility of the enemy" (Derrida, 1993: 355-356).

Aspirational constructivism introduced by Clunan (2012), posits that political elites promote their preferred national self-image in the public discourse and depict other countries as similar or dissimilar to the national Self. This depiction creates orientations to behave in a generally cooperative fashion toward in-group members and a generally competitive manner toward out-group member (Clunan, 2012: 5).

In other words, identities are *socially constructed* and *inherently relational*, such that collective imagination depends on a dialectical opposition to another identity. The ontology of otherness becomes the necessary basis of social imagination (Göl, 2005). Furthermore, Chaturvedi (2002) argues that the reflexivity in the process of othering is evident in the character as well as behavior of nations, which not only define themselves in respect to each other, but also seek for some kind of purity for the self through the demonization of the other (Chaturvedi, 2002).

Thus, the enemy images become crucial criteria for defining the self, as well as securing the national boundaries by the representation of danger (Campbell, 1998, p. 11). Bo Petersson (2006) notes that enemy images are highly instrumental in upholding the borderlines that help collective of people to establish and define their group identities (Petersson, 2006: 31).

The enemy images acquire salience especially during conflict escalation that leads to the "evilization" of the enemy and quite often to its portrayal as barbaric, cruel, uncivilized, immoral, treacherous and threatening (Hermann, 2003). The evilization is inherently linked to one of the most frequently observed functions of the enemy images – mobilization of population against the Other (Shakrai, 2015: 34). Nevertheless, as next sections suggest, in Georgian and Ukrainian discourses the term "evil", along with other narratives underlying the othering of Russia have been simply employed to describe the situation from a normative perspective.

The Georgian and Ukrainian cases are significant for several reasons. Georgia's and Ukraine's "choices for Europe" determining their post-Rose Revolution and post-Maidan trajectories provoked Russia into punishing their "disobedience." The worse came to the worst, as along with economic sanctions and coercive foreign policy measures, Russia resorted to military aggression, by occupying South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014. The armed conflict as such lasted only one week in August 2008, but the consequences endured for much longer, resulting in about 372 Georgian casualties and leaving about 127,000 persons displaced (Nichol, 2008:15-16).

Meanwhile, Ukraine has endured all the severe consequences that a hybrid war would cause. By the end of 2015, at least 9,000 people had been killed and more than 20,000 injured in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, coupled with over two million people ending up displaced (Freedom House, 2016).

Not surprisingly, Russian coercive policies have generated huge backlash against Russia across Georgia and Ukraine and led to its treatment as the biggest enemy of the nations. The enemy image of Russia has become a crucial component of post-Maidan Ukraine's identity construction. The former Ukrainian President Poroshenko would treat the external threat as an impetus to the contemporary Ukrainian political nation - building based on civic patriotism: "Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking citizens as well as the citizens speaking other languages... Ukrainians, ethnic Russians, Crimean Tatars, and other ethnic groups firmly uphold the position of Ukrainian patriotism. Shoulder to shoulder defend our state arms in hand" (Poroshenko, 2016). In Georgian and Ukrainian presidential discourses Russia has been regarded as irremediably aggressive, inherently imperial, inhuman that poses biggest threats to the liberal international order (Molchanov, 2015).

Such a rhetoric comes down to the development of an Us/Them binary that involves the semantic macro-strategies of positive Self-presentation and negative Other presentation (Van Dijk, 1993). The landmark study of Oddo (2011) provides valuable insights into the discursive strategies of othering, focusing specifically on Us/Them polarization. The latter involves employing legitimization techniques, such as (1) legitimization by reference to values; (2) legitimization by reference to temporality; and (3) legitimization by reference to group membership demarcation (Oddo, 2011:289). This goes into juxtaposing Our actions and values from Their actions and values, as well as by using the past and future to legitimate actions in the present. Furthermore, it delves into the ways that rhetors demarcate who belongs to Us and Them (Oddo, 2011:290).

This study follows Todorov (1999), in accepting that the relation between Self and Other cannot be understood on one level and thus there is a three-level analysis of the Other. In the first, the axiological level, a value judgment concerning the Other is made: “the other is good or bad”. The second, praxeological level, involves positioning and distancing in relation to the Other. At this level, Todorov argues that the self embraces the others’ values, identifies the Other with itself and imposes its own image on him. Todorov argues that in the third, the epistemic level, the Other could either be known or not “I know or am ignorant of the other’s identity” (Todorov, 1999:185). We specifically focus on the axiological level, on which the Self appraises the Other’s being in relation to the Self and asks whether the Other is better or worse than ‘Us’ (Tekin, 2010:13).

Building on these insights, this study examines the othering of Russia through temporal proximization, axiological and moral evaluation of the enemy, as well as through Saakashvili’s and Poroshenko’s discursive strategies of expanding and delimiting US through “clash of civilization” narrative.

3 The origins of othering: Us and Them in the past and future

Both Georgian and Ukrainian Presidents tended to make extensive use of the *temporal proximization* as a kind of legitimization technique to distance ‘US’ from ‘Them’. This involves construing the impact of past events in such a way that they seem to affect the current situation (Oddo, 2011: 296-297). The temporal proximization has much to do with social representation of history that is deemed important in creating, maintaining and changing a people’s identity. Liu and Hilton (2005) posit that “A group’s representation of its history will condition its sense of what it was, is, can and should be, and is thus central to the construction of its identity, norms, and values” (Liu and Hilton, 2005: 537). In a similar vein, the representation of history is instrumental in revealing the root causes of conflicts with other ‘groups’ and learning lessons from the past.

Notably, Poroshenko would attribute the menacing images of Russian Empire and Soviet Union to modern Russia and frame it as irremediably imperialistic and coercive, always trying to invade. Thus, the “ongoing aggression against us is a continuation of the same policy to destroy Ukraine with other methods” (Poroshenko, 2017).

Similarly, Saakashvili would regard Russia as inherently imperial, with a fervent desire to restore its greatness. Namely, he hailed the 2008 war as the continuation of Russia’s aggression that dated back to February 1921, when 11th Army crossed the Georgian borders recognized internationally and intervened into Georgia (Saakashvili, 2009).

By referring to the enemy image of Russia, Poroshenko would seek to assert Ukraine’s “victimhood” in the face of Russian devastating policies. Poroshenko would frequently exemplify Holodomor as a vivid manifestation of what crucibles and ordeals Ukraine was forced to pass through at the hands of Imperial Russia. “We have to tell the whole world that we will not forget the crimes of Holodomor-genocide and its perpetrators; we will not betray the ideals of the Revolution of Dignity” (Poroshenko, 2015). Moreover, he compared Holodomor to Holocaust and even contended that “Not recognizing the Holodomor is as immoral as denying the Holocaust” (Radio Liberty, 2017). Meanwhile, the genocide predator was not moral enough “to recognize the famine that killed millions of people in Ukraine under Soviet dictator Josef Stalin as genocide...or at least repent for it” (Radio Liberty, 2017).

The rhetoric of “genocide” became a common denominator in the confrontation over the Ukrainian East and the Crimea. Following Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine since 2014, Russian and pro-Russian Ukrainian voices from politics and the media would accuse Ukraine of genocide, which aimed to demonize the perceived enemy, mobilize internal support and gain interpretative authority over events (Dreyer, 2018). While Ukraine’s response came down

to intensifying its historical discourse of genocide, hailing Putin's policies as a direct successor to Stalin's policies of destroying Ukraine.

Consistent with Poroshenko's rhetoric, Saakashvili would contend that the Russian aggression vis-à-vis Georgia was inextricably linked to its imperial mindset and policies that were bound to persist. No wonder, "After a long embargo, economic blockades, provocations, bombardments, threats, boycotts and other rough but finally not successful pressures of the old KGB followers decided to finish the so-called "Georgian project," our common attempt to create a modern, European, democratic, successful state in Caucasus" (Saakashvili, 2009).

The references to the tragic past would be followed by the emphasis on escaping Russian geopolitical space to avoid further devastations. The Ukrainian President even brought up the issue of country's spiritual independence. He hailed December 15 - the date of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's vote on future relations with Moscow – as a historic day, stating that it was "the day of the final gaining of Ukrainian independence from Russia. And Ukraine will no longer drink, as Taras Shevchenko said, "Moscow's poison from the Moscow's bowl" (Poroshenko, 2018 a). Furthermore, Poroshenko would use the following narratives to emphasize Ukraine's departure from Russian the sphere of Russian political and cultural influence: "Farewell, unwashed Russia," "Farewell to you, our tender Misha, go back home to your wood of fairy tales," "Russian comrade, don't mess with Ukraine," "Away from Moscow! Europe now!" (Poroshenko, 2018a). Essentially, by employing opposing border – narratives between 'Us' and 'Them', Poroshenko has sought to irreversibly distance it from 'Russianness' (Nedozhogina, 2019). He expressed confidence that "Our generation is going to break this vicious circle... this tragic dependence on the empire" (Poroshenko, 2018a).

Similarly, Saakashvili would place a great deal of emphasis on the necessity of departing from the sphere of the Russian influence that could bring nothing but volatility and instability. More specifically, he largely treated Russia as the biggest impediment to peace and stability in its neighborhood, and the biggest instigator of conflicts (Saakashvili, 2013). The goal was to make the post-Soviet neighbors increasingly vulnerable, so that they are in no position of pulling out of the Russian influence and seeking rapprochement with Europe. His address at the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly is noteworthy: "Do you think that Vladimir Putin wants Armenia to decisively triumph over Azerbaijan, for instance? No. This would make Armenia too strong and potentially too independent. Do you think then that the contrary is true, that Moscow wants Baku to prevail over Yerevan? Obviously not. The current rise of a modernized Azerbaijan is a nightmare for the Russian leaders. No, they do not want anyone to prevail and the conflict itself is their objective, since it keeps both nations dependent and blocks their integration into the European common space" (Saakashvili, 2013).

Essentially, the references to the events of the past aimed at exposing the unbreakable chain between past and present in terms of Russia's imperial policies towards the two countries. Thus, to avoid future harm, they had no other choice but building resilience against the Kremlin and pulling out of its sphere of influence once and for all.

4 Expanding Us: Othering through "clash of civilization" narrative

Both Georgian and Ukrainian Presidents would consistently strive to expand 'US', through putting the conflicts with 'Them' in the broader framework of Russia-West/EU confrontation.

Remarkably, Poroshenko would make extensive use of the "clash of civilizations" narrative to emphasize the major gaps between European, democratic Ukraine and non-democratic Russia. This would often come down to the contentions that Russia poses acute threats to liberal democracies by rolling back democracy around the world and bringing down democratic governments in its neighborhood and beyond. More specifically, the incursions into the Ukrainian territory by Russia were framed as "one of the worst setbacks for the cause of democracy in the world in years" (Los Angeles Times, 2014).

Such claims are not novel. The conventional logic posits that the Kremlin has a strong interest in ensuring that regional and global democratic trends do not affect its hold over the Russian political system and that the legitimacy of democracy promotion and regime change are subverted (Roberts and Ziemer, 2018). Not surprisingly, Poroshenko would treat Russia as the biggest threat to liberal democracy and European system of values and even assert that "the aggression against Ukraine has opened a Pandora's Box for the international security" (Poroshenko, 2015a).

Thus, he called for consolidation of democratic nations as “Democracies must support each other” (Los Angeles Times, 2014). The main addressees of this call were the European Union and the USA who had a critical mission of “saving” Ukraine, as its fight against Russia was their fight too: “if Europe stands together with Ukraine on the defense of freedom, dignity, democracy and life without fear, then the future of Europe will be safe and bright” (Poroshenko, 2015b).

In Poroshenko’s words, Ukraine’s accession into the EU and NATO would lead to significant geopolitical breakthroughs, by transforming the landscape of the post-Cold war buffer zone (Poroshenko, 2015b). This would “push Russia to undergo the democratic and structural economic changes and gravitate towards the Western world... While kept in a buffer zone, Ukraine appears to provoke Russia to maintain its internal political status-quo and confront the European values” (Poroshenko, 2015b). It follows that it was in the EU’s and NATO’s best interest to accelerate Ukraine’s membership as a significant milestone in EU/West – Russia confrontation.

Consistent with the “clash of civilization narrative, Saakashvili would frequently contrast Georgia’s values with those of Russia, pointing to substantial differences and gaps. More specifically, ‘Georgia is a democracy, unlike Russia, which is not a democracy’ (Saakashvili, 2008a). Akin to Poroshenko, Saakashvili would expand ‘Us’ by putting the conflict with Russia in a broader framework of Russia-West confrontation and would even contend that the underlying objective of the Russian aggression was to destroy, occupy and capture Georgian territories as an episode of the European history (Saakashvili, 2008a). Meanwhile, the EU and NATO could prevent that from happening by accepting the country into their ranks. That being said “We are part of the democratic world and the democratic world should embrace Georgia” (Saakashvili, 2008b).

Saakashvili would contrast Russia’s image with that of Europe, as a vivid manifestation of a confrontation between “the rule of law and the rule of fear” (Civil Georgia, 2010). The “clash of civilizations” was put in the spotlight, as Russia created the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and tried to oppose it to the European Union. Saakashvili was quick to identify their opposite values and premises (Saakashvili, 2013). In his words, while the EU has been built on the rejection of the extreme nationalism, communism and imperialism, the EAEU was based on opposite premises “Because an old Empire is trying to reclaim its bygone borders. And “borders” is actually not the right word, since this Empire – be it the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation, or the Eurasian Union – never had borders. It only had margins (Saakashvili, 2013). Moreover, he alarmingly pointed to the coercive steps that the Kremlin was taking to absorb the post-Soviet countries into the ranks of its notorious union: “Armenia has been cornered and forced to sign customs union which is not in this nation’s interest or in the interest of our region. Moldova is being blockaded, Ukraine is under attack, Azerbaijan faces extraordinary pressure, and Georgia is occupied...” (Saakashvili, 2013).

Overall, Georgian and Ukrainian Presidents’ discursive strategies of expanding ‘US’ would be accompanied by claims that the Russian aggression against the two countries was part of its broader anti-Western policy. Thus, the Western allies had a critical mission of standing up to ‘Their’ aggression. Georgian President even expressed a hope that “Europe will do it in a much better way than it did in 1921 or in the 30ies of the last century” (Saakashvili, 2008c).

5 Moral evaluation of the Other: How to stand up to the enemy?

The images of a unit’s culture as more or less sophisticated, democratic, and advanced or crude, nondemocratic, and backward are a basic underlying cognitive component that is central to foreign policy decision-making. John Owen contends that perceptions of another state’s intentions as hostile or friendly may derive from prior images of the state’s culture as liberal and democratic or illiberal and nondemocratic (Hermann, 2003: 288). Essentially, the perceptions of “the Other” are intricately linked to its moral evaluations. Oddo (2011) notes that the overarching thematic formations of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ are, in large part, derived from the speakers’ patterned distribution of highly moralized lexical resources (Oddo, 2011: 294).

There has been a tendency for Russia to be portrayed as morally inferior both in Saakashvili-led Georgian and Poroshenko-led Ukrainian discourses. Poroshenko has treated Russia as inherently aggressive, inhuman, cruel and irremediably imperial with outright defiance of human rights and Ukraine’s sovereignty (Molchanov, 2015: 5-11). Not surprisingly, “inhuman” Russia would be frequently blamed for a bunch of atrocities, including “turning Ukraine

children into orphans, internally displacing over 1.5 million people and torturing patriots in prisons” (Poroshenko, 2018b).

Remarkably, the five-day war against Georgia prompted Saakashvili to put Russia in the category of Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union: “This is the first attempt since Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union, when a large state tried to at first force a neighboring state to kneel down and then tries to openly annex two regions, hence is trying to redraw borders in Europe” (Saakashvili, 2008d). Moreover, Saakashvili would contrast ‘peaceful’ Georgia with ‘aggressor’ Russia that acts against the values established by the civilized mankind (Saakashvili, 2008b). Furthermore, he hailed the Russian-Georgian conflict as an ideological confrontation, in which the Kremlin abuses its status as a “great power” to coerce “a small and insubordinate neighbor. “In one word this is an ideological confrontation. From the subjective perspective of Russia’s today’s Government - Russia is a “street boy.” Its leadership has criminal authority and Georgia all the sudden turned into a “best student” - a boy or a girl, he is getting the best marks, everybody likes, everybody cuddles, everybody want to help, everybody wants to open the way to him. Of course, he is not obeying the rules set by the “street boy”. “The street boy” hits him once, second, third time it pushed him with a shoulder, then it cursed him... finally the “street boy” decided to hit him well, but the “best student” slept back his hand and poked “street boy” back... Of course, for the mentality of “street boy” this is absolutely unacceptable situation” (Saakashvili, 2010a).

Overall, the following words have been used to describe ‘US’: free, democratic, European, independent, peaceful, peace-loving, humanitarian. Meanwhile, the adjectives used in describing ‘Them’ are as follows: Imperial, dictatorship, aggressor, inhuman, non-democratic, ruthless.

In Poroshenko’s words the “Imperialistic mindset” of the former Soviet Union prompted Russia to commit “most cynical acts of treachery in the modern era.” Yet, “We will never obey or bend to the aggressor...We are ready to fight. But we are a people of peace” (Los Angeles Times, 2014).

In sum, both presidents have made extensive use of moral evaluations to distinguish Their ‘dictatorial’, ‘inhuman’ and ‘aggressive’ nature from Our ‘democratic’, ‘peaceful’ and ‘moral’ one.

Such moral evaluations illustrate how the “complex discursive accomplishment” of moral exclusion emerges within presidential rhetoric to frame the relations with the enemy and legitimizing actions (Palicki, et. al, 2014). Poroshenko would frequently frame nationalism and patriotism as a critical bulwark against the Russian imperialism and aggression: “We are moving in our own direction. And the nation is now united by patriotism” (Poroshenko, 2018a).

It follows that unity and patriotism have been deemed essential to stand up to Russia and restore Ukraine’s territorial integrity: “The key to our victory is unwavering unity of the Ukrainian nation... Restoration of Ukraine has already begun. It is an irresistible process of purification of our lives, formation of renewed state, emergence of new people - patriots of Ukraine, heroes who stopped the attack of Empire with their feats,” Petro Poroshenko emphasized (MFA, 2015).

Not surprisingly, along with “spiritual independence,” the Ukrainian President would place a great deal of emphasis on the Ukrainian language “as a component of the strength and success of the Ukrainian people and key to the unity” (Opinion, 2019).

Saakashvili would emphasize the necessity of unity and fundamental economic and political transformation as effective tools for standing up to the enemy: “We should have boundless trust that we as a country will never be defeated by [Russia’s] 11th army [like in 1921 when Bolshevik Russia occupied Georgia] no matter in what shape it comes here. No alien force will ever be able to make us turn back. We should have boundless trust that all of us together have a common and very bright future. This trust will help us win a victory” (Saakashvili, 2007).

Saakashvili’s discourse suggests that Georgia was in no position to slow down, and there was no alternative to fundamental reforms: “either we will be successful, or Georgia will not exist any longer” (Saakashvili, 2010b). Furthermore, he hailed democracy as a buffer against hostilities towards Georgia, as “Democracy defends our country and destroys our enemy” (Saakashvili, 2008d).

Therefore, democracy promotion, rather than military build-up would be key to addressing foreign policy threats posed to Georgia chiefly by its belligerent neighbor Russia. Most importantly, democracy and prosperity would equip Georgia with ‘soft’ tools for reintegrating separatist regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia into a common Georgian state. ‘When we talk about what democracy means, it is a chance for Georgia to solve its problems, problems with our neighbors, problems associated with our conflicts’ (Saakashvili, 2005). Democratic and peaceful Georgia would respond to military build-ups with programs to lift children out of poverty through access to modern technologies, with

new hotels and new bicycling roads, new boulevards (Civil Georgia 2011). Furthermore, peaceful Georgia “will never use force to restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty” (Georgia Journal, 2010).

To sum up, the moral evaluations of the enemy were integral part of the othering strategies, accompanied by the claims that ‘Our’ unity and development were vital to building resilience against ‘Their’ hostilities.

6 Conclusions

This paper contributes to existing literature on the representation of the enemy images and discursive strategies of othering, by examining the cases of conflict-torn Georgia and Ukraine

Based on the previous discussion, there are five main concluding observations to make regarding the othering of Russia in Georgian and Ukrainian political discourses.

First, and in terms of the othering strategies, the Georgian and Ukrainian presidents have made extensive use of the temporal proximization as a kind of legitimation technique to distance ‘US’ from ‘Them’. This has involved construing the impact of past events in such a way that they seem to affect the current situation. Notably former Georgian and Ukrainian presidents Saakashvili and Poroshenko tended to attribute Russian Empire’s and Soviet Union’s images to modern Russia and treat it as “inherently imperialistic” and “irremediably aggressive.”

Second, the othering, has been characterized by axiological and moral evaluations of the enemy and its portrayal as morally inferior both in Poroshenko’s and Saakashvili’s discourses. More generally, the adjectives used in describing Russia are as follows: aggressor, inhuman, non-democratic, non-European, ruthless, etc.

The third observation relates to Georgian and Ukrainian presidents’ efforts at expanding and delimiting ‘US’. More specifically, the Russian aggression against the two countries has been put in the broader framework of Russia-West/EU confrontation. This is where the “clash of civilizations” narrative came in, with a tendency to frame the conflict with Russia as an “ideological confrontation” and even a demonstration of an antagonism between democracy and autocracy. Such claims would be accompanied by Russia’s treatment as a big threat to liberal democracies and European system of values. Not surprisingly, the Ukrainian and Georgian Presidents would frequently call for the consolidation of democratic nations, linking it to their quests for EU and NATO membership.

Fourth, in terms of the functions of the enemy images, the othering of Russia has been positively correlated with a growing emphasis on unity, nationalism and patriotism critical bulwarks against the Russian imperialism and aggression. Along with “spiritual independence” from Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian leadership would place a strong emphasis on the Ukrainian language, as a key to unity. In essence, the emphasis on the Ukrainian language, patriotism and unity has been inherently linked to Poroshenko’s efforts at reinforcing the ‘Ukrainianness’ of the nation and distancing it from ‘Russianness’. As for the Georgian case, it is noteworthy that the othering of Russia has been accompanied by a heightened emphasis on Georgia’s fundamental transformation into a modern European state, leading to its homecoming to Europe. Both Georgian and Ukrainian Presidents were consistent in their treatment of European and Euro-Atlantic integration as a path to democracy, prosperity and security in the face of Russian imperial policies.

7 References

- Campbell, D. (1998) *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Chaturvedi, S. (2002) Process of Othering in the Case of India and Pakistan. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 93(2): 149-159.
- Civil Georgia (2010) Saakashvili’s Address to European Parliament. <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22883> Accessed: 11-03-2020.
- Civil Georgia (2011) Saakashvili’s Speech at the UN General Assembly 2011. <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23958> Accessed: 17-04-2020.
- Clunan, A. (2012) Constructivism’s Micro-Foundations: Aspirations, Social Identity Theory, and Russia’s National Interests. In *APSA 2012 Annual Meeting Paper*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2106681 Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Clunan, A. L. (2009). *The Social Construction of Russia’s Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests*. JHU Press.

- Derrida, J. (1993) Politics of friendship. *American Imago*, 50(3): 353-391.
- Dreyer, N. (2018) Genocide, Holodomor and Holocaust Discourse as Echo of Historical Injury and as Rhetorical Radicalization in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict of 2013–18. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 20(4), 545-564.
- Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman.
- Freedom House (2016) Ukraine: Freedom in the World 2016. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/ukraine> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Georgia Journal (2010) President of Georgia's address to European Parliament Members. <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/politics/1453-president-of-georgias-address-to-european-parliament-members-.html> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Göl, A. (2005) Imagining the Turkish Nation through 'Othering' Armenians. *Nations and Nationalism*, 11(1): 121-139.
- Hermann, R. K. (2003) Image Theory and Strategic Interaction in International Relations In: Sears, D., Huddy L. and Jervis, R., ed., *Oxford handbook of political psychology*, 1st ed. Oxford University Press: 285-314.
- Jung, H. (2019). The Evolution of Social Constructivism in Political Science: Past to Present. *SAGE Open*, 9(1): 1-10 .
- Liu, J. H. and Hilton, D. J. (2005) How the Past Weighs on the Present: Social Representations of History and their Role in Identity Politics. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(4): 537-556.
- Los Angeles Times (2014) Ukraine's Fight with Russia is 'America's War, Too,' Poroshenko says. <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-poroshenko-address-congress-20140918-story.html> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Luostarinen, H. (1989) Finnish Russophobia: The story of an enemy image. *Journal of Peace Research*, 26(2):123-137.
- MFA (2015) Petro Poroshenko: We Will Not Forget Crimes of Holodomor-Genocide and Perpetrators of those Crimes. <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/press-center/news/42800-ne-zabudemo-zlochyniv-golodomorugenocidu-ta-jogo-vinuvatcivpetro-poroshenko> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Minesashvili, S. (2016) Narrating identity: Belongingness and Alterity in Georgia's Foreign Policy. In: Kakachia, K. and Markarov, A., ed. Values and identity as Sources of Foreign Policy in Armenia and Georgia, Universal: 11-33.
- Molchanov, M. (2015) Russia as Ukraine's 'Other': Identity and Geopolitics. *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, edited by Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2650162 Accessed: 11-01-2015.
- Nedozhogina, O. (2019) Redrawing Symbolic Boundaries After Maidan: Identity Strategies Among Russian-Speaking Ukrainians. *National Identities*:1-19.
- Neumann, I. B. (1998) Russia as Europe's Other. *Journal of Area Studies*, 6(12): 26-73.
- Neumann, I. B. (2013) *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*. Routledge.
- Nichol, J. (2009) Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for US Interests. *CRS Report for Congress*. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34618.pdf> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Oddo, J. (2011) War Legitimation Discourse: Representing 'Us' and 'Them' in Four US Presidential Addresses. *Discourse & Society*, 22(3): 287-314.
- Opinion (2019) The Ukrainian Language (dis)connects: What Language Policy Do Zelensky and Poroshenko Have? <https://opinionua.com/en/2019/04/17/the-ukrainian-language-disconnects-what-language-policy-do-zelensky-and-poroshenko-have/> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Petersson, B. (2006) *Stories About Strangers: Swedish Media Constructions of Socio-Cultural Risk*. University Press of America.
- Pilecki, A., Muro, J. M., Hammack, P. L and Clemons, C. M. (2014) Moral Exclusion and the Justification of US Counterterrorism Strategy: Bush, Obama, and the Terrorist Enemy Figure. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 20(3): 285-299.
- Poroshenko (2015) Speech by President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko at the Munich Security conference. <https://mfa.gov.ua/ua/press-center/news/32864-speech-by-president-of-ukraine-petro-poroshenko-at-the-munich-security-conference> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Poroshenko (2016) Speech of the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko at the Independence Parade. <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/press-center/news/50208-vistup-prezidenta-ukrajini-pid-chas-paradu-nezalezhnosti> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Poroshenko (2018a) Speech by President Poroshenko on the Results of the Unification Synod. <http://www.ukrweekly.com/uwwp/> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Poroshenko (2018b). In UN address, Ukraine President Denounces Russia's 'Aggressive Expansionist Policies'. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1020921> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Radio Liberty (2017) Ukraine's Poroshenko Calls on Russia to 'Repent' For Holodomor. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-holodomor-poroshenko-commemoration/28876715.html> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Radio Liberty (2019) Russia, West Clash During UN Session on Ukraine's Language Law. <https://www.rferl.org/a/law-on-ukraine-state-language-comes-into-force/30057943.html> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Ruggie, J. G. (1998). What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge. *International organization*, 52(4): 855-885.
- Saakashvili (2005) Georgian President Addresses Nation Ahead of Bush visit. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2765&i=1> Accessed: 18-03-2020.
- Saakashvili (2007) Georgian President Addresses Nation After Unrest. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2360&i=1> Accessed: 11-01-2020.
- Saakashvili (2008a) Press Conference Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili and German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2239&i=1> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Saakashvili (2008b) The President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili's Statement. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2312&i=1> Accessed: 18-03-2020.

- Saakashvili (2008c) The President of Georgia Met the Representatives of EU Countries. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2337&i=1> Accessed: 11-04-2020.
- Saakashvili (2008d) The President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili's Annual Speech Presented in the Parliament of Georgia. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2304&i=1> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Saakashvili (2009) The President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili's Speech Delivered at the Ceremony Dedicated to Russia - Georgian War Anniversary. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=2247&i=1> Accessed: 17-03-2020.
- Saakashvili (2010) Parliamentary Majority Session was Held in Batumi. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=5275&i=1> Accessed: 13-03-2020.
- Saakashvili (2010a) The Meeting of the President of Georgia with the Majority Members of Georgia's Supreme Legislative Body in Anaklia. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/print.aspx?t=1&i=5409> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Saakashvili (2013) Address by the President of Georgia at the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. <http://www.saakashviliarchive.info/en/PressOffice/News/SpeechesAndStatements?p=8465&i=1> Accessed: 14-04-2020.
- Shakrai, I. (2015) The Legitimization of Authoritarian Rule through Constructed External Threats: Russian Propaganda During the Ukrainian Crisis. *East European Quarterly*, 43(1): 29-54.
- Stefánsson, V. (2015) *Is Russia Europe's Other? How the Ukraine Crisis Reinforces European Identity Formation* (Doctoral dissertation). <https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/22766/3/Is%20Russia%20Europe%27s%20Other%20Skemman-PDF.pdf> Accessed: 17-03-2020.
- Stråth, B. (2008) Belonging and European Identity. *Identity, Belonging and Migration*, 17: 21-37.
- Tekin, B. Ç. (2010) *Representations and Othering in Discourse The Construction of Turkey in the EU context*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- The Guardian (2019) Ukraine adopts language law opposed by Kremlin. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/25/ukraine-adopts-law-enforcing-use-of-ukrainian-in-public-life> Accessed: 15-03-2020.
- Todorov, T. (1999) *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1993) Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Discourse & society*, 4(2): 249-283.
- Way, L. A. (2019) Ukraine's Post-Maidan Struggles: II. Free Speech in a Time of War. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(3): 48-60.
- Weiss, G. and Wodak, R. (2003) Introduction: Theory, Interdisciplinarity and Critical Discourse Analysis. In *Critical Discourse Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.