Why We Speak Like That: Ambiguous Discourses of an Ambivalent Transformation

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Abstract: This article examines some changes in the political discourse of post-Soviet Ukraine as exemplified by the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the old term "democracy" and the relatively new terms "civil society" and "national identity" that marked the advent of post-communism and postcolonialism, respectively. Arguing that current Ukrainian political discourse is as ambiguous and eclectic as the entire Ukrainian post-communist transformation, the author lays out the factors that determined this ambiguity.

The main hypothesis of this study is that today's Ukrainian political discourse is as ambiguous and eclectic as the entire Ukrainian post-communist transformation.[1] This ambiguity and eclecticism is determined by a number of factors, two of which seem to be of primary importance.

First, independent Ukraine emerged as a pacted continuation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.[2] In practical terms the negotiated tran-

[1] It is reflected even in the titles of some books and articles: Dominique Arel. 1998. "Ukraine: The Muddle Way," *Current History* 8, 342-6; Andrej Lushnytsky. 2009. *Ukraine on Its Meandering Path between West and East* (Bern: Peter Lang); Marta Dyczok. 2000. *Ukraine: movement without change, change without movement* (Amsterdam: Harwood); Pavlo Kutuev. 2000. "Development of Underdevelopment: State and Modernization Project in the Post-Leninist Ukraine," *Thinking Fundamentals. IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences* 9: 10 (Vienna: Institut fuer die Wissenschaften vom Menschen): 2–3; Serhiy Kudelia. 2012. "The sources of continuity and change of Ukraine's incomplete state," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45: 3-4.

[2] For a detailed account of Ukraine's postcommunist transformation, see Taras Kuzio. 1997.

sition meant that no radical, revolutionary changes occurred either on the political scene or in the academic sphere. The country's personnel, institutions, and their practices remained largely unchanged.[3] Soviet mentality and terminology were suppressed, modified, and supplanted by the appearance of "new thinking" and "democratic" jargon, but some essentials of Leninism-Stalinism survived to spectacular effect.[4] Tentatively, they can be identified as a profound belief that politics is a zero-sum game, the winner takes all, the ends justify the means, and the state is a supreme, nearly deified value. These feelings and attitudes are apparent in practical policies and agents' behavior, while in political discourse they are usually mystified, euphemized, and disguised by a quasi-democratic newspeak.[5] Deconstruction of this newspeak, counterchecked by analysis of respective political practices, reveals the underlying political principles that inform authoritarian feelings and attitudes: a superficial (and essentially populist) notion of democracy as the majority will and neglect of (or even contempt for) types of liberalism that stand for minority rights, rule of law, checks and balances, equal opportunities, and many related principles and mechanisms that are critically missing in the rather crude notion of Marxist-Leninist "democracy."

Second, in public discourse the illiberal democracy that evolved in Ukraine tends not only to marginalize or distort terms and concepts related to liberalism, but also to completely exclude some notions related specifically

Ukraine under Kuchma. Political Reform, Economic Transformation and Security Policy in Independent Ukraine. London: Macmillan; Andrew Wilson. 2000. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation.* New Haven: Yale University Press, ch. 9; Serhy Yekelchyk. 2007. *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation.* Oxford University Press, ch. 11; Wsevolod Isajiw, ed. 2003. *Society in Transition: Social Change in Ukraine in Western Perspectives.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press: chapters 1-2 & 6-8.

[3] For changes in academia, or rather lack thereof, see Hryhoriy Hrabovych (George Grabowicz). 1997. "Sovietyzatsiya ukrayinskoyi humanistyky." *Krytyka* 1: 1-2; also his "Ukrayina: pidsumky stolittia," *Krytyka* 3: 11 (1999); and "The Soviet and Post-Soviet Discources of Contemporary Ukraine: Literary Scholarship, the Humanities and the Russian-Ukrainian Interface," in Janusz Korek, ed. 2007. *From Sovietology to Postcoloniality. Poland and Ukraine from a Postcolonial Perspective.* Huddinge: Sodertorns hogskola.

[4] The peculiarities of Soviet mentality were first discussed by Aleksandr Zinoviev in *Homo sovieticus* (1986). For a comprehensive sociological analysis of the phenomenon, see Yuriy Levada (ed.). 1993. *Sovetskiy prostoy chelovek.* Moscow: Mirovoy okean. The Ukrainian case was examined in Yevhen Holovakha. 1992. "Osoblyvosti politychnoyi svidomosti: ambivalentnist suspilstva ta osobystosti." *Politolohichni chytannia* 1: 1, 24-39. See also his "Fenomen 'amoralnogo bolshinstva' v postsovetskom obshchestve" ["The Phenomenon of 'Immoral Majority' in the Post-Soviet Society: Transformation of Mass Beliefs about Social Behavior Norms in Ukraine"]. *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny* 6 (2002): 20-22; http://ecsocman.hse.ru/data/291/985/1219/04golovaha-20-22.pdf

[5] Various ambiguities of political discourse are conceptualized as a part, and instrument of creation, of a specific post-communist "normalcy" in Volodymyr Kulyk. 2010. *Dyskurs ukrayinskykh mediy: identychnosti, ideolohiyi, vladni stosunky.* Kyiv: Krytyka.

to the quality of democracy, such as its content and procedures.[6] Some terms like "responsiveness of the authorities," "vertical and horizontal accountability," and "distributive justice" have never entered the language practices and apparently even consciousness of Ukrainian politicians, while some other terms like transparency, participation, competitiveness remained shallow and slogan-like, never properly explained or elaborated. Imitative democracy requires some terms that mimic Western provenance and imply credibility and respectability. Therefore, thousands of lecturers of "scientific communism" became "politologists" and "culturologists," minor adventurers and self-professed spin-doctors became "image-makers" and "political technologists," and the country's thuggish power politics took on the elegant label of "administrative resources" – just as ordinary post-Soviet bandits and robbers acquired fashionable imported titles of "raiders" and "racketeers" instead of their more vulgar native equivalents. In a similar move, many post-Soviet services enhanced their credentials by appending the prefix "Euro-" to their advertising – hence Eurorepair, Eurocleaning, Eurolaundry, Eurotires, Euro[car]washing, and so forth.[7] Superficial appropriation of Western terms is especially noticeable in the poor translation of Western concepts related specifically to procedures and other practical technicalities that "make democracy work" (in Robert Putnam's words), like agents and institutions, political actors, institu-tionalization, specific policies, electoral fund-raising, double/quadruple transition, dilemmas of collective action, etc. A serious problem remains to distinguish, in both discourse and practice, equity and equality, efficiency and effectiveness, legality and legitimacy, or to remove old biases against some terms like "nation" (associated with "bourgeois nationalism" under the Soviets) and a new bias against some other terms, like "federalization" (that nearly became a dirty word thanks to the journalistic/propagandistic coinage of "federasts," i.e. supporters of federalization in Ukraine).

To elaborate on these hypotheses, I applied content analysis and critical discourse analysis to a set of official documents, political state-ments, publications in mainstream newspapers and electronic media. Also, I compared the language of translated books and articles with the language of relevant Ukrainian textbooks and other publications. For practical purposes, only three terms were considered in detail – democracy, civil society, and national identity. Each of them, I believe, is highly represen-tative of the Ukrainian post-communist context and, at the same time, is very specific.

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[6] Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino. 2004. "The Quality of Democracy: An Overview." *Journal of Democracy* 15: 4 (October): 22-28.

[7] Volodymyr Yermolenko. 2010. "'Euromova' ta yiyi ukrayinska versiya: novi slova i novi obyekty" ["'Eurospeak' and Its Ukrainian Version: New Words and New Objects"], *Ukrayina moderna* 5: 16, 63-86.

Democracy, a term that was broadly used in Soviet times, has undergone substantial modification. Civil society is a relatively new term that emerged during the perestroika era as a symbol and factor of post-totalitarian changes. National identity is also a rather new term in Ukrainian discourse, yet its emergence reflects not only the post-totalitarian, but also the postcolonial situation.

Democracy: Between Ritual and Procedure

In political discourse, the term democracy has perhaps the widest currency. This extensive use makes it vague, sometimes shallow, and often detached from its initial meaning. Even in scholarly, non-propagandistic usage, it may stand for such different things as a system of values (civic rights and freedoms), a system of governance (institutions and procedures), or practical results of democratic governance (rule of law, vertical accountability, transparency, and responsiveness).[8]

It is primarily the first, axiological aspect of democracy that has been emphasized in the post-communist discourse ("human rights" in particular). Less popular is the second, procedural aspect (reduced typically to the idea of multi-party elections). And the third, functional aspect is virtually ignored (remarkably, all the main elements of "good governance" have no firmly established analogues in the Ukrainian language). "Rule of law" might be the only exception. But the very fact that the term is detached from basic and, presumably, immanent elements of democracy and featured separately seems to prove a tacit recognition that democracy (at least in its local modification) does not necessarily assume the rule of law. Not incidentally, the first paragraph of the Ukrainian Constitution states out that "Ukraine is a sovereign, independent, democratic, social, and lawful state."[9]

Here, the reference to the "social" character of the Ukrainian state might be mere rhetoric, a concession to paternalistic habits of the Sovietized population and to demands of the leftist parliamentary majority. Yet, an attempt to strengthen the term "democratic" with the term "lawful" is as curious as the desire to buttress the term "sovereign" with the term "independent." In both cases, we observe repercussions of confused terminology and emasculated terms, originating from the Soviet newspeak where neither "sovereignty" was any kind of sovereignty nor "democracy" was anything but a sheer dictatorship.

The main feature of the "socialist democracy" was its profound illiberalism, essential for any totalitarian ideology. Marxism-Leninism defined

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[8] Andrzej Antoszewski, Ryszard Herbut, eds. 1998. *Leksykon politologii.* Wroclaw: Alta, 60-61.

[9] http://www.president.gov.ua/content/chapter01.html

democracy as a "form of the state where power formally (as in exploiter states) or de jure and de facto (as in socialist states) belongs to the people." The Soviet Ukrainian Encyclopedia (1961) maintained that "socialist democracy is a form of dictatorship of the proletariat that suppress the resistance of the exploiter classes, creates inviolable alliance of workers and peasants, fights for an incessant growth of well-being of working people, for international peace, and directs the whole society in its struggle for communism."10 Apparently, democracy in this ideological discourse had been not just a way of governance, but the symbol of all things good.

Yet, unlike the democracy that existed in the communist doctrine at least verbally, liberalism has been a priori ostracized as a hostile ideology. Even tolerance was condemned as a "rotten liberalism" that ran against the dominant idea of class struggle and ideological vigilance and implacability. The Soviet Ukrainian Encyclopedia defined liberalism as a "bourgeois political and ideological trend that emerged in the late 18th–early 19th century, in the period of struggle of the industrial bourgeoisie of the West European countries against the feudal gentry and absolutist monarchy." Its essence accounted for the desire of the liberal bourgeoisie to "restrain the monarch's power, eliminate estate privileges and achieve a formal equality of people's rights and other bourgeois-democratic liberties." Yet, "as the contradictions of capitalism sharpened and the proletariat entered the historical scene, liberalism had completely lost its progressive features and became merely a tool of deception of the working masses, of their diversion from the revolutionary anti-capitalist struggle… [Lenin] proved that bourgeois liberalism is a subtle form of betrayal of the people's interests, a counterrevolutionary force that must be unmasked and isolated to make the successful development of the revolutionary movement possible… The term 'liberalism' became synonymous with conciliatoriness, tolerance for negative phenomena, and a complacent attitude toward class enemies."11

Predictably, the gradual liberalisation of the Soviet authoritarianism during the perestroika period had been officially presented as a broadening and perfection of the "socialist democracy," rather than its radical replacement with liberal democracy. An official slogan of the time was "More democracy – more socialism!" The Soviet leadership did not introduce liberal democracy but mere "democratization" – a softening of the old-style authoritarian system. The awakened civil society increased, however, its pressure upon the authoritarian state, demanding the civil rights and liberties enshrined in the Soviet constitution to become real. In institutional and procedural terms, however, this democratization remained weak. The first competitive, albeit not free, elections were held only at the end of perestroika, the multi-party system gained ground only after the end of the

10 *Ukrayinska radianska entsyklopediya,* vol. 4. 1961. Kyiv: URE, 70-71.
11 Ibid., vol. 8. 1962. 156-157.

Soviet Union, and a real division of powers or effective system of checks and balances was never introduced even after that.

Post-Soviet democracy primarily developed the elements that had existed, at least verbally, in "socialist democracy" – referring mostly to its axiology. And it failed to develop the elements that had never existed before – the elements that make democracy function: first of all, rule of law, but also the institutional and procedural elements that ensure fair voting and all the adjacent processes and procedures.[12]

The evolution of "socialist democracy" into "postsocialist democracy" largely explains both the illiberal character of the new brand and its grim dysfunctionality. It also explains the apparent indifference of post-communist politicians to the whole set of liberal ideas that are essentially alien to them. It does not explain, however, why these people, so skillful in ideological mimicry and showy rhetoric, avoid the term "liberalism" – a striking contrast to the other fashionable terms they employ. None of the Ukrainian presidents – neither the incumbent nor his three predecessors – have ever used the term in their public pronouncements.[13]

In fact, they seem to avoid the term purposefully. On many occasions, they declared their intention to make Ukraine a "civilized, lawful, European, democratic state" but never a "liberal democracy." Their unconscious bias against the term can be partly determined by the traditional Soviet hostility towards any liberalism. More likely, however, it results from the traditional Marxist reduction of everything to economic relations. Liberalism, in this discourse, appears to be a radical alternative not only to socialism, but also to the "social state," "social protection," "social programs" and so on. It becomes a demonic embodiment of the capitalist laissez faire, of wild jungles where only the strongest species survive.

Democracy in the post-Soviet states is often associated with lawlessness and chaos, corruption and inefficiency.[14] If the term "lawful" is added

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[12] For an excellent analysis of institutional changes after communism, see Paul D'Anieri. 2007. *Understanding Ukrainian Politics: Power, Politics, and Institutional Design.* Armonk NY: M.E.Sharpe.

[13] See Leonid Kravchuk. 1992. *Ye taka derzhava – Ukrayina* [speeches, interviews, press-conferences] (Kyiv: Hlobus); Leonid Kuchma. 2000. *Viriu v ukrayinskyi narod.* Kyiv: Alternatyvy. Viktor Yushchenko's and Viktor Yanukovych's statements can be checked on the internet. They contain not a single reference to liberalism or liberal democracy. For the sake of justice, one should mention also that the leaders of the opposition are not much different in this regard. See, for instance, Viacheslav Chornovil. 2000. *Pulse of Ukrainian independence.* Kyiv: Lybid.

[14] Thomas Carothers defines it as "feckless pluralism," Lucan Way writes about "pluralism by default." In both cases they refer to the seemingly democratic, but highly dysfunctional institutions that fail to deliver basic services to citizens. See Th. Carothers. 2002. "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13: 2 (January), 9-10; and L. Way. 2005. "Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine," *World Politics* 57 (January)

to the term "democratic" (state), it is likely to convey some idea of law and order. If the term "liberal" is added instead, it implies probably even more of chaos and lawlessness. The post-Soviet politicians may not comprehend this rationally, but they certainly feel it intuitively. They know their people are fond of "strong leaders" like Putin or Pinochet rather than Havel-style liberals. Even though they accept "democracy" at least formally, for international self-legitimization, they try not to bother themselves additionally also with "liberalism." The "lawful state" definitely sounds better.[15]

In Ukraine, the democracy discourse goes hand in hand not only with promises of "social protection" and "rule of law," but also with a rhetoric of "European integration" ("we must be democratic if we want to return to Europe") and of "state building" ("our democracy is weak and dysfunctional, but we should bear it patiently until we build our national state"). All these good things are combined within the same discourse absolutely unproblematically, even though there are a lot of deep contradictions – both in theory and in practice – between liberal democracy and building a social (or national) state.

It was only at the turn of the 1990s that the term democracy began to be questioned and problematized. There were two probable reasons for this. On one hand, the growth of authoritarianism in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states provoked both the regime supporters to legitimize these tendencies and the regime opponents to criticize them and to deconstruct the legitimizing discourses. On the other hand, the same tendencies forced western analysts to revise the dominant transition paradigm as overoptimistic, and to study in depth the specificity of illiberal, imitative democracies in the post-Soviet states.[16]

There is a growing number of scholarly works and textbooks in Ukraine today where the notion of democracy is elaborated well, with due

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232. As a result, people increasingly distrust all institutions and multi-party democracy in general. See V. Vorona, M. Shulha. 2010. *Ukrayinske suspilstvo 1992-2010. Sotsiolohichnyi monitoring* (Kyiv: Instytut sotsiolohiyi): 490-491.

[15] Opinion surveys reveal very low popular support for any political ideology: more than 50 percent of respondents either are undecided, do not care, or have no idea. The most popular ideologies – socialist, social democratic, and national democratic – enjoy public support of about 10 percent each. Liberal ideology has appeal only for two percent of respondents. (Vorona & Shulha, 487). In Russia, in a different survey, 90 percent of respondents (versus 1 percent) prioritized "order"; 70% (versus 9) prioritized "freedom"; 49% (versus 19%) prioritized "democracy"; and 20% (versus 34%) mentioned "liberalism" as something that Russia really needs. See L. Gudkov, B. Dubin, N. Zorkaya. 2008. *Postsovetskiy chelovek i grazhdanskoe obshchestvo* (Moscow School for Political Research): 49.

[16] See Fareed Zakaria. 1997. "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* 76: 6 (November-December): 22-43; Larry Diamond. 2002. "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes." *Journal of Democracy* 13: 2; Dmitri Furman. 2007. "The origins and elements of imitation democracies." *Eurozine* (October), http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-10-09-furman-en. html; Andrew Wilson. 2005. *Virtual Politics. Faking Democracy in the post-Soviet World.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

attention not only to its axiological aspects but also to institutional and functional aspects that largely determine the quality of democracy, and with proper distinction between its liberal and illiberal (electoral, imitative, "sovereign") brands.[17] Still, the critical mass has not been created yet to effectively influence the popular discourses where the simplified Soviet notion of democracy prevails.

Civil Society: Between Reduction and Essentialization

The term "civil society" had not practically existed in the Soviet discourse. Only the 1973 Ukrainian "Philosophic Dictionary" mentioned civil society – as a "term that, in the bourgeois philosophy and sociology of the 18th– early 19th century, referred to social relations in a narrow sense of property relations as opposed to political society, i.e., the state." Eventually, the Dictionary concluded, the term was employed by the early Karl Marx in his criticism of Hegel. "Marx rejected the idealistic notion of civil society and proved that property relations (civil society) are merely a legal expression of the productive relationship. Later on, Marx had replaced the term with such scientific categories as economic structure of society, economic basis, mode of production, etc."[18]

The fact that the term virtually had not been used in the Soviet era does not mean that it fully avoided the influences of Soviet linguistic clichés, connotations, and mental stereotypes. The Ukrainian analogue – *hromadianske suspilstvo* – has no semantic references to civility but, rather, to community (*hromada*) and citizenry (*hromadianyn*). Still worse, in the communist discourse both citizenry and society have clear authoritarian connotations. Citizenry, in the Soviet newspeak, matches typically with "civic position," "civic consciousness" or even "civic vigilance," and signifies primarily the highest loyalty for the regime and a particular ideological mobilization. Also, society that has no autonomy from the totalitarian state and no ideological heterogeneity, stands in this discourse merely for an essentialized, undifferentiated "people," "working masses," or "builders of communism."

Today, one may notice an impact of that discursive tradition in the excessive ideologization of the term "civil society," in exaggeration of its mobilizational functions and capabilities, and underestimation of its particularism and heterogeneity. Again, as in the case of democracy, the term is essentialized and misused – to signify all things good (or, vice

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[17] E.g., Ivan Titar. 2008. "Konsolidatsiya demokratiyi: problema vyznachennia poniattia." *Sotsiolohiya: teoriya, metody, marketing* 12: 4, 39-54; Yaroslav Romanchuk. 2010. *Liberalizm. Ideologiya schastlivogo cheloveka* (Kyiv: KIS). Vladimir Zoltarev. 2008. "Populiarnaya virusologiya. Prava." *Telekrytyka* (November 20), http://www.telekritika.ua/media-continent/authorcolumn/zoloto/2008-11-20/42105

[18] Volodymyr Shynkaruk. 1973. *Filosofskyi slovnyk.* Kyiv: URE, 86.

versa, all things bad – depending on the ideological stance of the speaker).

The essentialization of this and many additional terms in the post-Soviet discourse resulted, however, not only from the inertia of totalitarian thought and speech but also from the specific conditions of late perestroika and the fall of the USSR, when the terms emerged. Their main feature was a strong ideological confrontation, a kind of a cold civil war that occasionally, in some places, turned hot. The term civil society emerged in that context as a synonymic extension of a more popular term "*neformaly*", i.e., informal, unregistered civic organizations and initiatives, but also – as a rhetorical alternative to the state-centric "totalitarian society" or "community of subjects." The term emerged primarily not as a sign or the instrument of comprehensive analysis of the new phenomenon but rather as a slogan and symbol of emancipation of the society from the totalitarian party-state.[19]

The term became popular only by the mid-1990s. This popularity resulted not only from translations of basic books on civil society by western authors, but also from the growing anxiety of East European societies by the course of post-communist transformation.[20] Intellectuals had to answer the questions: Why had the fall of totalitarianism not led to liberal democracy? Why had the end of the Empire not resulted in the dreamed-of "national revival"? And why did the transition from the state command economy to the arguably free market not bring prosperity but, rather, more economic chaos and mass poverty?

Civil society (or, rather, its weakness or absence) entered the scene as a universal answer to all these questions. While scholars, to their credit, tried to problematize the term and to examine it within a broader circle of concepts and problems,[21] the popular discourse employed the essentialized term as a symbol of all things good – alongside with "democracy," "state building," and "European integration."[22]

Remarkably, the 1992 collection of articles, speeches, and interviews

[19] Zbigniew Rau (ed.). 1991. *The Reemergence of Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the USSR*. Boulder: Westview Press: 95-112.

[20] The translations included Karl Popper's two-volume "The Open Society and Its Enemies" (1994), Alexis de Tocqueville's "De la democratie en Amerique" (1999), Robert Putnam's "Making Democracy Work" (2001), and the 1,100-page anthologies "Democracy" (2005) and "Liberalism" (2002).

[21] Vasyl Lisovyi. 1996. *Fenomen hromadianstva*. Kyiv: Demokratychni initsiatyvy; Ihor Pasko, Yaroslav Pasko. 1999. *Hromadianske suspilstvo i natsionalna ideya*. Donetsk: Skhidnyi vydavnychyi dim; Antonina Kolodiy. 2002. *Na shliakhu do hromadianskoho suspilstva*. Lviv: Chervona kalyna; Anatoliy Karas. 2003. *Filosofiya hromadianskoho suspilstva v klasychnykh teoriyax i neklasychnykh interpretatsiyakh*. Lviv: LNU; Yaroslav Pasko. 2008. *Sotsialna derzhava i hromadianske suspilstvo: spivpratsia versus protystoyannia*. Kyiv: Parapan.

[22] E.g., Mykhaylo Papiyev. 2007. "Hromadianske suspilstvo: mif, realnist chy shans?" Dzerkalo tyzhnia (November 3), http://www.dt.ua/1000/1550/61018/

by President Leonid Kravchuk contains no reference to civil society.[23] A year later, he mentions it all the time, within the standard set of his political priorities: "We are building a lawful, democratic independent state, a civilized civil society."[24]

A tautological reference to "civilized civil society" (not so obvious in Ukrainian "*tsyvilizovane hromadianske suspilstvo*") reveals the same terminological vagueness and discursive uncertainty as was noticed before, in the constitutional definition of Ukraine as a "sovereign and independent state." In mythical thought, multiplying the same words or their synonyms serves to express a great, uncountable and indescribable amount of something. In this case, however, the same rhetorical instrument is used not to prove a great amount of Ukrainian "civility" or "sovereignty" but, rather, to hide uncertainty in these qualities and buttress them with additional words. In this view, one may easily explain why the word "civilized" acquired the same broad currency in the Ukrainian political discourse as the word "European" in the discourse of daily commercials and ads. In both cases, we observe a kind of virtual marketing – selling something that does not exist or exists in small quantity and/or is of poor quality.

Paradoxically, the advance in better defining the concept of civil society in Ukrainian intellectual discourse at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s via both academic translations and original works by Ukrainian authors went hand-in-hand with its further trivialization in the discourse of politicians, servile post-Soviet academicians, "political technologists," and obedient mass media.[25] "Civil society" is employed as an official slogan to legitimize and to gentrify the authorities that become more and more authoritarian, lawless, and illegitimate. References to "democracy,"

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[23] See Leonid Kravchuk. 1992. *Ye taka derzhava – Ukrayina. Materialy z vystupiv*. Kyiv: Globus.

[24] *Holos Ukrainy*. 1991. (April 13): 1.

[25] Probably the loudest public debate on the topic was caused by Volodymyr Lytvyn's provocative article "Civil Society: Myths and Reality" where he argued that civil society is not useful since NGOs pursue corporate interests rather than the public good, and include among their ranks criminal structures and terrorist organizations. The large article was published in a popular tabloid *Fakty i kommentarii* (January 19, 2002; http://www.facts.kiev.ua/Jan2002/1901/03.htm), with daily circulation of about half a million. The reason for the unusual publication was two-fold. First, Dr. Lytvyn at the time was chief of staff for President Leonid Kuchma, and both of them, after the Gongadze affair, desperately needed to defeat the opposition in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. And secondly, the owner of the newspaper was billionaire Viktor Pinchuk, the president's son-in-law. To make the story even more bizarre, experts shortly disclosed that the article was almost fully plagiarized from Thomas Carothers' essay "Civil Society" (*Foreign Policy* 117, Winter 1999-2000). The text was only slightly doctored to make the author's denunciation of civil society even harsher. Lytvyn's article was fully reprinted by a liberal weekly *Dzerkalo tyzhnia* (January 26; http://www.dt.ua/1000/1550/33631), with critical comments by Anatoliy Hrytsenko (http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2002/1/26/20855.html) and Hryhoriy Nemyria (http://www.irf.kiev.ua/old-site/ukr/news/2002.02.01.18.02.hn.text.html).

"civil society," "rule of law," and "European integration" in the speeches of the president and his officials sounds like a ritualistic mantra, a kind of a smoke-screen to hide their non-European, non-democratic, uncivil and unlawful practices.[26] The verbal glorification of civil society is accompanied by a real offence against it that includes discriminatory laws, selective reprisals completed by tax and other controlling and supervising bodies, and – most interesting in this context – systemic discrediting of NGOs as allegedly cynical, greedy, corrupted, and dangerous agents of foreign influence.[27]

The 2004 Orange revolution that was proclaimed by many as a triumph, revival or, at least, the birth of civil society in Ukraine has not brought, however, any attempts to problematize the notion of civil society in political discourse. Ironically, the term almost completely disappeared from political discourse in the post-revolutionary environment. This may result from the simple fact that the end of official repression is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the development of civil society, liberal democracy, the free market, national culture, and so on.[28]

In the intellectual discourse, the discussions on civil society shifted toward talks on political culture, social capital, and institutional (especially constitutional) design. In the popular discourse, more fashionable topics emerged as well, related to the politics of memory, national identity, regionalism, and, once again, institutional design (separation of powers, in particular). Orange leaders seemed not to suffer from a deficit of democratic legitimacy and therefore did not need to compensate for it with imitative rhetoric. A looming institutional inefficiency was a different matter. Here, they failed to complete badly needed reforms and tried to make up for it with the hectic creation of various civic councils, commissions and other bureaucratic initiatives with no effect. In fact, their

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[26] Earlier in 2012, president Viktor Yanukovych established the Coordinating Council for the Development of Civil Society in Ukraine (*Kyiv Post,* January 26, 2012; http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/yanukovych-establishes-coordinating-council-for-de-121190.html) and decreed the "State policy strategy to support the development of civil society in Ukraine and priority measures for its implememntation" (*Official website*, March 24, 2012; http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/14621.html). For a comprehensive critical analysis of this initiative, see Volodymyr Lartsev. 2012. "Yanukovych namahayetsia stvoryty ruchne 'hromadianske suspilstvo'" ["Yanukovych tries to create a tame 'civil society'"]. *Radio Svoboda* (April 27),   http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/24561733.html

[27] Taras Kuzio. 2011. "Ukrainian Politicians Put the Squeeze on Civil Society." Radio Liberty (May 18). Viktor Yanukovych's policy vis-a-vis civil society largely follows Leonid Kuchma's, with one major innovation. Now, authorities not only create fake, government-managed NGOs on an unprecedented scale, but also encourage and probably organize raiders' attacks on the existing NGOs, with the ultimate goal to transform them into obedient GONGOs. E.g., "Falsyfikatsiya ustanovchykh zboriv Hromadskoyi rady MVS Ukrayiny." Hurt (28 January 2013); http://gurt.org.ua/news/recent/16799/

[28] Orysia Lutsevych. 2013. "How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society and Democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine." Briefing Paper. *Chatham House* (January).

predecessors imitated the same "care" for civil society with the difference only being in the motivation. For Kuchma's regime, it was an attempt to hide or downplay the large-scale reprisals against NGOs. For Yushchenko and his colleagues, it was just an attempt to hide their own inefficiency, and to give some symbolic concessions to the civil society that had actually brought them to power.

Two major tendencies, however, remained unchanged: the persistent attempts to reduce civil society to consisting only of NGOs [29] and to reduce all the functions of civil society to a "dialogue" between society (primarily NGOs) and the authorities.[30] Such reductions can probably bring short-term positive effects – as an antidote to the pending essentialization of the term and a way to fill it with earthly meaning and concrete tasks. Yet, as with any simplification, they hamper the study and comprehension and, ultimately, development of the phenomenon itself.

National Identity: Between the Mainstream and Marginality

The term "national identity" did not have any currency in the Soviet era, and did not even attain the limited and marginalized usage of "civil society." This lack of attention resulted not only from the traditional communist bias against all things national[31], but also from an imperial desire to homogenize the political and cultural space[32] – even though restrained briefly for tactical reasons in the 1920s.[33] The Soviets, as communists, despised nationalism as a hostile ideology that strove allegedly to divide the working class and to ensure the dominance of a national bourgeoisie under the false slogan of "national unity." And, as imperialists, they had even more reasons to hate nationalism and "nationalists" who resisted imperial homogenization and threatened the empire's territorial integrity.

Ideologically, the national question in the Soviet Union was said to be solved within the doctrine of "proletarian internationalism" that

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[29] Yevhen Bystrytsky. 2007. "Peredchuttia hromadianskoho suspilstva." *Dzerkalo tyzhnia* (November 11), http://www.dt.ua/1000/1550/61107/

[30] Yuliya Tyshchenko, Vladyslava Bakalchuk. 2013. "Non-Governmental Organizations and the Government." In Pawel Laufer. ed. A Report on the Condition of Culture and NGOs in Ukraine. Lublin: Kultura Enter: 227-239. See also Piotr Kazmierkiewicz. "The Condition of Ukrainian Civil Society – an Attempt at Diagnosis." Ibid., 206-216; and Yevhen Borisov, Andriy Yanovych. "Local Grassroots Initiatives as an Alternative for the NGO Sector in Ukraine." Ibid., 240-249.

[31] Roman Szporluk. 1988. *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List.* Oxford University Press.

[32] Alain Besancon. 1986. "Nationalism and Bolshevism in the USSR," in Robert Conquest (ed.), *The Last Empire. Nationality and the Soviet Future*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press; Alexander Motyl. 1987. *Will the Non-Russians Rebel?* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

[33] Terry Martin. 2001. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalisms in the Soviet Union 1923-1939.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

subordinated all national interests to the class interest. And politically, it was arguably solved within the institutional framework of the Soviet quasi-federation that was said to ensure the flourishing and, at the same time, fusion of nationalities – up to their complete merger within the single "Soviet nation." Cultural and linguistic differences were officially recognized and even praised rhetorically, but effectively were undermined by the official emphasis on their temporary, transitional character: they were merely tolerated as formal, decorative, "regional" forms of the common "socialist content."[34]

All these formulas and clichés had never been problematized. The national question could not be discussed, but only praised as an undeniable success story, a great victory of the Communist party and another proof of its leaders' wisdom. Even remote and seemingly innocuous historical or foreign material was blocked from public discussion. The regime feared possible analogies and, even more, the corrosion of totalitarian discourse following the penetration of alien discursive elements.

The concept of "national identity" was certainly considered such a subversive element. It not only referred to the nationalities problem, extremely uncomfortable for the Soviets, but, worse, problematized the very idea of Soviet identity – as identity neither civic nor ethnic but primarily statist, based on a non-reflexive acceptance of totalitarian ideology and unconditional loyalty to the party-state. The notion of identity implied the idea of self-identification, i.e. of free choice of identities and their hierarchies. The Soviets were not eager to allow these ideas wide acceptance in the lands they controlled.

They were not able, of course, to completely erase the term (and phenomenon) that had gained broad currency in western psychology and sociology since the beginning of the 20th century. In some cases, Soviet humanities referred to the emotional identification of a person with another individual, or group, or an ideal. The term "identification," however, was strictly tied to a concrete situation, a particular problem, a specific person or group, and never became fully generalized, purely abstract and universally applicable.[35] In a sense, it can be compared to different meanings of the word "history" before and after the 18th century. The word acquired its abstract meaning (history as a subject, a field of knowledge) only in modern times, while in the earlier centuries it had been just a history, a story, a particular narrative about somebody or something.

The emergence of "identity" as a genuinely abstract category meant

[34] Ivan Dziuba. 1974 [1968]. *Internationalism or Russification? A Study on the Soviet Nationalities Problem.* New York: Monad Press; Paul Robert Magosci. 1996. *A History of Ukraine.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, chapters 42, 48 & 49; Serhy Yekelchyk. 2007. *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation*. Oxford University Press, chapters 6, 9, and 11.

[35] *Slovnyk ukrayinskokoyi movy,* vol. 4. 1973. Kyiv: URE, 11.

self-identification with some imagined community, not merely with a concrete person or group. It was a result of new human experience and new horizon of expectations. In post-Soviet Ukraine, it was the experience of freedom, of emancipation from the totalitarian state, which defined both the hierarchy of identities and their essence so strictly and rigidly that the category of identity became useless, tautological vis-a-vis other, ideologically essentialized categories. Yet, it was also a new horizon of expectations that implied a free choice of identities and of their hierarchies, a construction and reconstruction of new identities and imagination (or reimagination) of new communities.[36]

Acquiring Ukrainian national identity proved to be a difficult task, not only because of Ukraine's difficult and protracted totalitarian legacy, but also because of its particular legacy of colonialism. The identity's crucial aspect was a negative self-image imposed by the colonizers upon the colonized. A great many Ukrainians (as well as Belarusians) had adopted and internalized an imperial view of themselves as a provincial, culturally-inferior brand of Russians. Mental emancipation from this negative self-image turned out to be no easier than acquiring political liberation.[37] In such a context, the national identity issue became especially topical and controversial.

On one hand, the term is extensively used by both academic and non-academic authors, with a clear tendency among the latter to employ it as a synonym for "national self-awareness" (or "self-consciousness") – in the romantic tradition of 19th-century nationalism. Thus, the informing/acquiring of a national identity becomes synonymous with "nation-building,"

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[36] Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* was published in Ukrainian in 2001. It was followed by translations of Ernst Gellner's "Nationalism" and "Nations and Nationalism" (2003) , Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's "The Invention of Tradition" (2005), Monserrat Guibernaus's "The Identity of Nations" (2012), and supplemented with four different books by Anthony Smith, and a 900-page anthology "Nationalism" (2000). As to the orginal works by Ukrainian authors, two pioneering books were published in 1999 – Heorihiy Kasianov's analytical survey *Theories of Nation and Nationalism*. Kyiv: Lybid, and Oleksandr Hrytsenko's *Native Wisdom. National Mythologies and Civic Religion in Ukraine*. Kyiv: KIS.

[37] I elaborated the issue in more detail in "Russkiy Robinzon i ukrainskiy Piatnitsa: osobennosti 'assimmetrichnykh' otnosheniy", in Aleksandr Etkind, Dirk Uffelmann, Ilya Kukulin, eds. 2012. *Tam, vnutri. Praktiki vnutrenney kolonizatsii v kulturnoy istorii Rossii.* Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 447-477. An earlier shorter version was published as "The Ukrainian 'Friday' and the Russian 'Robinson': The Uneasy Advent of Postcoloniality", in Serhy Yekelchyk (Guest Editor). 2010. *Ukrainian Culture after Communism*, a special issue of *Canadian American Slavic Studies* 44: 1-2 (Spring-Summer): 5-20. See also Oksana Grabowicz. 1995. "The Legacy of Colonialism and Communism: Some Key Issues." *Perspectives on Contemporary Ukraine* 2: 2, 3-16; Myroslav Shkandrij. 2001. *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press; Tamara Hundorova. 2007. "Postcolonial Ressentiment – the Ukrainian Case." In Janusz Korek, ed. *From Sovietology to Postcoloniality. Poland and Ukraine from a Postcolonial Perspective.* Huddinge: Sodertorns hogskola.

"national awakening," "enlightening," and "revival."

On the other hand, the mainstream politicians and media are very cautious about the terms related to the word "nation" – including not only "nationalism" but also "national idea," "national identity," "national consciousness/self-awareness" and so on. There is a strong, probably subconscious rejection of everything related to "nationalism" – a sinister word that was used in the Soviet discourse almost exclusively with the adjective "bourgeois" and typically meant some form of criminal accusation.[38] (Remarkably, there were no references to Russian "bourgeois nationalism" in this discourse since the 1930s; implicitly, only non-Russians could have been "bourgeois nationalists," so the educated non-Russians had to be especially careful and extremely loyal to avoid this label). Consequently, even today, the majority of politicians prefer to speak of the "people," not the "nation," of the "state interest" rather than the "national interest," and of "state building" rather than "nation building."

As a result, on one hand, the propagandistic misuse of the term "national identity" reduces it to a merely "ethnic identity" or instrumentalizes it as a form of "national consciousness" or "self-awareness" to be "revived." On the other side, the politically correct avoidance of this term or its deliberate marginalization in the mainstream media and political discourse support, unintentionally, such a reduction and marginalization because such an approach fails to problematize the misuse of the term, on the contrary – it represents the misuse as a reason to marginalize both the term and all its related problems, to push them away discursively from the realm of "normalcy" into the realm of obsession and deviation.

Volodymyr Kulyk, who has published a number of articles on Ukrainian media discourses, revealed the main strategy of all discussions on identity-related issues, including national memory, history, language and cultural policy, and so on. According to him, it aims at the preservation of the postcolonial status-quo, i.e., of the political, economic, and cultural dominance of the post-Soviet oligarchy – the old Soviet nomenklatura merged with the underworld.[39] In cultural terms this means the dominance of a much more urbanized and socially-advanced group of Russians

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[38] Within the past twenty years, the popular support for "nationalism" as a political ideology has never exceeded 2 percent of the respondents, according to the annual surveys of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences (Vorona & Shulha, 487). The bias against the word does not necessarily mean any similar rejection of the phenomenon signified by that word, and is even less likely to translate into a political vote – as the recent relative success of the nationalistic party "Svoboda" (10 per cent in the 2012 parliamentary elections) may illustrate. Most experts agree that a large portion of that vote was of a protest rather than ideological character. By the same token, the Communist party won 15 per cent – twice the number of self-declared sympathizers for communist ideology, according to the same surveys.
[39] See fn. 5. Also, Volodymyr Kulyk. 2010. "Ideologies of language use in post-Soviet Ukrainian media." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language,* 201, in particular chapters 4-5.

and Russophones over provincial and, in most cases, socially backward Ukrainophones.

Discursively, the strategy is realized primarily via the representation of the postcolonial situation as basically "normal" and the neutralization (through silencing, distorting and stultifying) of any attempts to question and problematize this "normalcy." All the discussion of national identity, or a language or cultural policy, are pushed onto the margins of public discourse – into specialized, esoteric intellectual journals or into internet forums where they become easy prey for marginals from both sides – Ukrainophobic and Ukrainophile, providing thus additional evidence that the very topic is marginal, deviant, and duly ignored in the mainstream. In fact, the dominant group rides high on "banal nationalism" (in Michael Billig's term), i.e. on mental clichés, daily habits, discursive practices, and civic rituals largely inherited from the Soviet past and only slightly adjusted to the new realities. This secures for the dominant group a comfortable position as "internationalist," and helps to ostracize rivals who question the postcolonial status-quo, as "nationalists" and troublemakers. The routinized character of banal nationalism makes it almost invisible ("normal"), while any attack on that normalcy looks "nationalistic" – as Aleksandr Lukashenko's grip over Belarus graphically illustrates.

In Ukraine, however, the situation is more complex. The postcolonial status-quo is strongly challenged here by anti-colonial, anti-neocolonial and, especially, postcolonial counter-discourses. In this regard, intense translation of western scholarship and appropriation of western terms and concepts provide Ukrainian intellectuals with new strategies and arguments, and facilitates intellectual dialogue in general.[40] The society at large, however, is still waging a cold civil war – a war of discourses, symbols, and identities – and this makes seemingly unimportant issues of language, culture, and identity the most debatable and controversial.

Conclusion

Even though the categories of "democracy," "civil society," and "national identity" play a very important role in today's political discourse, they obviously do not exhaust all the peculiarities of its post-communist development and functioning. They reveal only some tendencies and basically prove the hypotheses posed at the beginning of this essay.

The main argument was that political discourse in contemporary Ukraine is as hybrid, eclectic, and ambivalent as Ukrainian post-communist

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[40] The most important translations that facilitated Ukrainian postcolonial discourse included Edward Said's "Orientalism" (2001) and "Culture and Imperialism" (2007), Ewa Thompson's "Imperial Knowledge" (2006), Larry Wolff's "Inventing Eastern Europe" (2009), and five major books by Michel Foucault. Remarkably, all of them were published before the Russian analogues, even though most Ukrainians easily read Russian.

politics and mentality in general. It reflects an inconsistent, inefficient, and still uncompleted process of decommunization and decolonization of the country, i.e., an emancipation of the society from the state, a radical change of authoritarian institutions and practices, an effort to put the state under the efficient control of society, and an overcoming of the cultural, informational, and mental dependence on the former metropole.

Ukraine still is in a cold civil war that has also a national liberation aspect. Political discourses largely reflect these wars and, at the same time, are their key components. As a result, they tend to be rather simplistic and simplifying, resistant to dialogue, insensitive to details and nuances, and prone to reductionism and/or essentialization. Political symbolism often dominates over impartial analysis, and propaganda prevails over problematization.

The appropriation of western political discourses via academic translations and popular references is severely hampered and often distorted by the resistance of old Soviet-totalitarian and Russian-colonial discourses (mostly in residual forms), as well as by the increasingly strong anti-liberal and anti-Western counter-discourse of today's Russian mass media and pop culture that are broadly consumed in Ukraine. Another problem with western political discourses in Ukraine is their imitative, superficial appropriation by the post-communist nomenklatura-cum-oligarchy, who subsequent empty, emasculate, and transform all their basic terms and categories into simulacra.

Nonetheless, anti-liberal discourses in Ukraine, despite their apparent strength and resilience, seem to be on the defensive. They seldom challenge their opponents openly, employing instead various forms of mimicry and simulation. This makes the need for their analysis and deconstruction even more topical.