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UKRAINE 2014:

THE FIRST POSTCOLONIAL REVOLUTION.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FORUM

The events of the past year in Ukraine have been unprecedented, and therefore not easily comprehensible as a single yet complex phenomenon.

Naturally, both participants and outside observers are trying to identify these events with some familiar scenarios, “recognizing” the traits of yet another “color revolution” against a post-Soviet autocracy, or a national liberation movement, or a bourgeois revolution. We simply lack a ready analytical language and explanatory models to describe the birth of the new Ukraine as a unique and – yes – unprecedented phenomenon. It is the task of the forum *Ukraine and the Crisis of “Russian Studies”: Participant Observation of History in the Making* in this issue of *Ab Imperio* to coordinate the collective intellectual efforts required to begin elaborating this language and these models. As a way of expanding the repertoire of available explanatory paradigms, I suggest a serious consideration of the concept of postcolonial revolution. This notion can be seen as too pretentious and vague,¹ but it might be the only way to account for the main characteristics

¹ “Postcolonial revolution” is used quite indiscriminately in literary studies and the social science literature as a synonym for the anticolonial revolutions of the second part of the twentieth century, or the rise to prominence of postcolonial studies as a methodological trend. Both understandings are employed synchronously, cf.: Apollo Obonyo 22

of the “Ukrainian events” themselves and the ways that participants in the forum reflect on them: the astonishingly persistent manifestation of one’s own subjectivity in pursuit of forging or upgrading Ukrainian collective subjectivity. The Ukrainian revolution is a postcolonial revolution because it is all about the people acquiring their own voice, and in the process of this self-assertive act they forge a new Ukrainian nation as a community of negotiated solidary action by self-conscious individuals.

The Many Faces of the Euromaidan Revolution

To a superficial observer, any revolutionary rhetoric appears the same, but we should look beyond the obvious manifestations of rebellion, which are indeed quite universal (whether barricades or inflammatory speeches by charismatic leaders). We will see then that not every type of revolution can equally meaningfully describe the realities of Ukraine and the ways they are perceived by participants and analysts.

First, it should be explained why “revolution” – and not, say, *civil war*. People are free to use words indiscriminately, but to better grasp the meaning of the phenomenon (rather than just expressing one’s attitude toward it), this word choice must be a conscious one. Doubtless, over the past year Ukraine has seen an escalation of intercommunal violence, with citizens of the same country killing each other, often on political grounds. Should we characterize any intercommunal conflict as civil war (from land disputes to banditry to hate crimes)? A typical civil war, twentieth-century style, implies the principled clash of opposing collective subjectivities, “two truths” that cannot find a compromise and are determined to seize supreme authority in the nation. The “Maidanites” are all about distinctive subjectivity, political ideals, and social program. What is the distinctive “truth” of their armed opponents, their alternative program for Ukraine? There is no such a program and no interest in Ukraine, as the leaders of Donetsk and Luhansk “republics” explicitly announced their ultimate goal to secede and join the Russian Federation.² To this, one can respond with an example of the archetypal civil war of the nineteenth century – the U.S. Civil War that was

Amoko. *Postcolonialism in the Wake of the Nairobi Revolution: Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and the Idea of African Literature*. Basingstoke, 2010; Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (Ed.). *Decolonizing European Sociology: Transdisciplinary Approaches*. Farnham, 2012.

² This was announced on May 12, 2014, at a press conference by Denis Pushilin, then leader of the Donetsk People’s Republic. See *Sovet Donetskoi narodnoi respubliki prosit Rossiiu rassmotret’ vopros o vkhozhenii DNR v RF* // http://novorossy.ru/news/news_post/sovets-doneckoy-narodnoy-respubliki-prosit-rossiyu-rassmotret.

about secession from a federation. This historical parallel only underscores the inappropriateness of the “civil war” model to analyze Ukrainian events: did American Confederates dream about joining, say, Mexico? Did they oppose the North because they felt themselves to be “ethnic Mexicans” and were afraid that the “Washington Junta” would make them speak English instead of Spanish? Separatism and treason are understandable causes for a rebellion, why should it be masked by something else?

The notion of *bourgeois-democratic revolution* is occasionally employed when discussing Maidan and post-Maidan political developments, primarily because the most visible public figures associated with the movement belong to the educated middle-age, middle-class stratum (in the forum, this point is advanced in comments by Kharkiv sociologist, Oleksiy Musiyezdov). The appeal of the classical formula is understandable, but in the modern world, “bourgeois-democratic revolution” can be used only as a metaphor rather than an analytical category. It was coined and developed by Marxist ideologues and social scientists in the nineteenth century specifically to denote the radical transformation of society from feudalism to capitalism, when a new hegemonic class overthrows the old one and brings the political superstructure into accordance with the already transformed socioeconomic basis (from monarchy to a constitutional regime).³ Maidan took place in a society with a capitalist market economy and an institutionalized political democracy. It overthrew no monarch but a legitimately elected president, and expressed distrust of the parliament (or at least the majority of its members), but it did not question the very values and principles of capitalist economy and parliamentarism. Perhaps, the only thing that Maidan shared with historical “bourgeois” revolutions was a common reliance on the European tradition of political liberalism that acknowledged the right of popular rebellion against tyranny. In fact, in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), John Locke claimed that a revolution was an obligation and a civic duty if a government abused the rights and interests of citizens.⁴ Maidan as a declaration of civic subjectivity toward and disobedience of a government that disregarded people’s rights and interests was very Lockean in spirit, but hardly “bourgeois” in practical terms.

³ The subsequent theoretical crystallization of the concept of “bourgeois revolution” as a historical stage preceding the proletarian revolution, and the ensuing debates among different interpretations of this idea central to Marxism were rooted in the original sketchy outline provided by Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in 1852. See Karl Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Chicago, 1907.

⁴ John Locke. *Two Treatises of Government*. New York, 1965, particularly §§ 220-230.

The concept of an *anticolonial uprising* makes sense when people rise against either direct or indirect alien rule. Anticolonial rhetoric plays a rather marginal role in Ukrainian public discourse, as can also be seen in the roundtable of Ukrainian sociologists, “Regions of Ukraine: What Separates Us and What Brings Us Together?” published below. Already in April 2014 social scientists from several Ukrainian cities met in Kharkiv to discuss the new post-Maidan social realities, and only few of them (employed by the state police academy) resorted to the language of colonial dependence – and only to explain the motivation of separatists, not revolutionaries. The main goal of the meeting was to elaborate an active research and civic solidary position of social scientists – the theme of expressing one’s personal subjectivity and enhancing the active public role of the profession was central to most speakers. It is not only probably inaccurate to frame the evident political, economic, and especially cultural dependence of Ukraine and many Ukrainians on Russia in the recent past in colonial terms; more importantly, it seems that many Ukrainians find it offensive to even think of themselves as former “colonials” (see the Facebook post by Dnipropetrovsk politician Boris Filatov, published three days before the meeting of sociologists in Kharkiv). The very refusal to play the subaltern card as an ultimate justification for the Ukrainian revolution can be explained by their fundamental incompatibility. Subalternity can be found as a significant social condition in Russia, Belarus, or Uzbekistan, but just imagine characterizing the Ukrainian Euromaidan with the authoritative declaration by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak:

Subalternity is a position without identity. ... Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action.⁵

Anticolonial revolution is a powerful act of transcending one’s subalternity, but not one’s embedded dependence on the former colonial master. The most highly articulated anticolonial revolutions are set within the imperial political sphere and are framed by the imperial political imagination: rejection does not necessarily beget emancipation.⁶ In the soft version of anticolonial resistance, former subalterns manage to coordinate collective action, but only in the name of their traditional moral economy and framed

⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular* // *Postcolonial Studies*. 2005. Vol. 8. No. 4. P. 476.

⁶ This argument is substantiated in Jeremy Adelman. *An Age of Imperial Revolutions* // *American Historical Review*. 2008. Vol. 113. No. 2. Pp. 319-340.

by local knowledge.⁷ Thus, in neither case is there room to express one's own distinctive subjectivity (untampered by the former imperial overlords) as the main driving force of the uprising. The anticolonial paradigm just does not fit the imagined community of Ukrainians and the vision of Ukraine "from the Syan to the Don" that integrates the many regional a local knowledge in Ukraine. (Equally important is that this self-sufficient Ukraine does not depend on the mental map of the would-be colonizer – the Russian Federation, because Russian mental maps envision Ukraine today within absolutely different spatial, cultural, and historical dimensions).

The model of *national revolution* or *national liberation movement* seems to better fit the realities of Maidan and the public discourses making sense of it. Quite a few contributors to the forum argue along these lines (most forcefully, Volodymyr Kulyk in his article "Ukrainian Nationalism since the Outbreak of Euromaidan"). The abundance of interpretations of the phenomenon of "nation" provide ample opportunities to cast Maidan in national terms. This seems all the more appropriate given the high visibility of Ukrainian nationalists on Maidan and on the front of the Russo-Ukrainian war that followed, as well as the centrality of the discourse of nation-building in post-Maidan Ukraine. Whatever one's understanding of nation (as either ethnic, political, cultural, or territorial community), "national revolution" implies the rise of some preexisting nation to complete sovereignty. This model can be combined with the anticolonial framework ("anti-imperial struggle") or the idea of bourgeois revolution ("internal liberation movement"), but in any version and combination one fundamental condition remains in place: initially, some sort of a national compound rises to the ultimate consciousness as an entity, and then it moves on to eliminate all obstacles on its path to sociopolitical self-realization. This (essentially Hegelian) historical scenario can be recognized in the story of the downfall of the Soviet system in 1989–1991, quite typical for the twentieth century. Think of the Baltic republics of the USSR that demanded the right to self-determination as a way to restore some preexistent condition of "violated wholeness": national purity unhindered by Russian/Soviet admixtures, and statehood ruined by the Soviet annexation. The ethnoculturally homogeneous and fully developed nation expressed itself in coordinated linguistic and

⁷ This point has been extensively elaborated by James C. Scott: *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven, 1979; *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, 1985; and recently: *Decoding Subaltern Politics: Ideology, Disguise, and Resistance in Agrarian Politics*. Abingdon and New York, 2012.

artistic acts (such as the “Singing Revolution” of September 1988 on the Tallin Song Festival Grounds that gathered well over 100,000 Estonians), lacking only one final element: political sovereignty.

As can be seen in the materials of the forum, this rhetoric was employed by a rather marginal group of Maidan activists (mostly by nationalists), and does not correspond to the general social and political dynamics of the movement, from November 2013 through January, to postrevolutionary developments. In this broader perspective we see that the main pre-Maidan political force representing organicist nationalism (“integral nationalism” in the Ukrainian political tradition) – the all-Ukrainian movement “Freedom” – has dramatically lost its popularity amid the unprecedented national mobilization. There is no contradiction here: what we are seeing in Ukraine is the process of national mobilization and consolidation (the majority of observers agree on that), only this process takes the opposite course compared to standard twentieth-century national movements. There was no real preexistent historical Ukrainian state to be restored within its original borders, and no homogeneous nation in agreement about its composition. Individual people with active civic positions stepped forward to protest the abuse of their rights by the tyrannical regime, and in the course of their collective action a new type of solidarity emerged, and a new Ukrainian nation came into being. The Ukrainian nation became the product of the revolution, not its perpetrator. Thus, it is even linguistically inaccurate to call this revolution a “national liberation movement”.

The last and probably the least intellectually productive of the familiar revolutionary scenarios is the concept of *color revolution*. The most sophisticated rendering of this explanatory strategy views it as a final anti-Soviet revolution (see the contribution by Sergei Zhuk in the forum). This is an insightful and thought-provoking approach, but it is more a metaphor than a self-sustainable explanatory model, as it first requires an explanation of how we understand the persistence of “Sovietness” almost a quarter century after the collapse of the Soviet regime and socioeconomic order. The dominant take on “color revolutions” perceives them as little more than special operations by some powerful political actors (hence the names that sound like coded secret plans: the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, the Grape Revolution in Moldova, and so on). Within a more analytical and academic context, it is recognized that color revolutions were just a milestone somewhere in the middle of the long transition process from communism, and not “true” revolutions.⁸ Code words

⁸ See Lincoln A. Mitchell. *The Color Revolutions*. Philadelphia, 2012.

or not, the names of color revolutions are really meaningless – but we cannot say this about the Ukrainian revolution of 2014 that immediately proclaimed itself the Revolution of Dignity.⁹ The study of languages of self-description by historical actors is central to the research paradigm developed by *Ab Imperio*, and from this vantage point the name of the Ukrainian revolution alone presents a decisive argument against comparing it to color revolutions. “Dignity” is a fundamental quality of one’s developed subjectivity (cf. Latin *dignitas* – worthiness). The Revolution of Dignity could have been produced only by self-conscious moral and political subjects, having it in mind not just to topple the irritating government but to impose their subjectivity as a new system of coordinates for the revolutionary society. Communicating this content requires a lot of words and practical actions, it cannot be signified by any single color or plant.

The Postcolonial Revolution

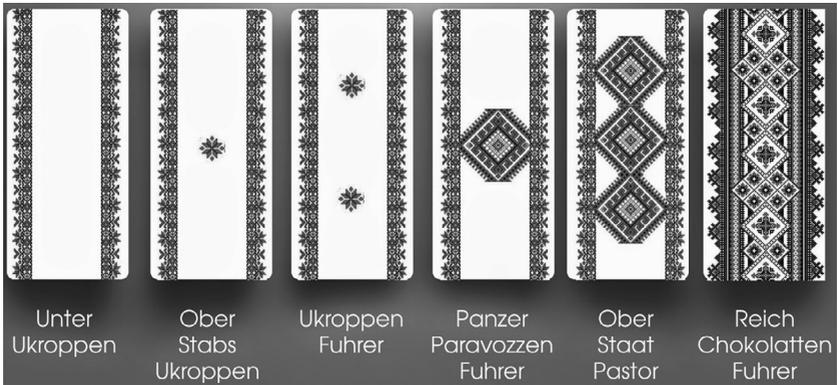
The 2014 revolution was not purely “political” or “civic.” Its participants of different cultural backgrounds were concerned with stressing its culturally Ukrainian character, using the main symbols of Ukrainian cultural identity: language, patriotic greetings, key figures of the literary canon, dress, and imagery. Even so, this revolution – and the nation it forged – should not be conceptualized in terms of fixed identities (“civic” vs. “ethnic,” “political” vs. “cultural,” etc.). As Yaroslav Hrytsak stresses in his contribution to the forum, the radical breakup with the politics of identity (central to anticolonial and national liberation movements of the twentieth century) is what sets Ukraine apart from its neighbors, first of all – Russia:

the Ukrainians of Euromaidan are preoccupied with modernization and values, whereas Putin’s Russia worries about security and identities.... national issues were not the only items on its [Maidan] agenda – in fact, they were not even central. Neither were, for that matter, questions of language or historical memory.

This distinction drawn by Hrytsak is a key to grasping the unprecedented uniqueness of what is happening in Ukraine.

⁹ The name became widespread between December 11, 2013 – when it was probably used for the first time in mass media – and February 28, 2014, when it was cited in a publication “as the most common name of the Ukrainian revolution”. See Iuliia Luchik. *Revoliutsiia gidnosti // Den’*. 2013. December 11. <http://www.day.kiev.ua/uk/blog/politika/revolyuciya-gidnosti>; Iaroslav Pritula. *Vid Revoliutsii Gidnosti do gidnogo zhittia // Ekonomichna pravda*. 2014. February 28. <http://www.epravda.com.ua/columns/2014/02/28/423251>.

Ukrainian revolution is postcolonial because it not only set out to overthrow the political and economic hegemony of a tyrant (foreign or domestic) but also released the forces of societal self-organization. Even more: the public agenda of revolution and, particularly, of the postrevolutionary period, has been defined predominantly by the citizens of Ukraine and on their terms, not by Yanukovich or Putin (and the need to respond to their “initiatives” – a camouflaged form of dependence). A very general framework for binding common values (shorthanded as “European choice”) structured an open field for negotiating a common subjectivity and acting in accordance with it. There is nothing metaphysical about these generalizations: the new Ukrainian subjectivity reveals itself in empirically verifiable and even statistically quantifiable social interactions, on the micro- and macro scale.



The fictional catalog of Ukrainian military shoulder marks mocking both the top political leaders and the propaganda image of Ukrainians as ethnicity-obsessed Nazis (hence the pseudo-SS sounding nomenclature of ranks and the ornament). The image became viral in the Ukrainian section of the Internet in early September, 2014. Source: Twitter account of Vil’na Ukraïna, September 3, 11:36 a.m. #ukroppen.

We know that this is a new phenomenon because it largely ignores or creatively recodes the readily available historical precedents and symbols. The readily available political symbolism and historical mythology of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and other forms of Ukrainian nationalist mobilization of the 1940s play a surprisingly marginal role in the country at war. Arguably, this role was much more marginal (on the scale of the whole country) than the role of the 20th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS in the Estonian public sphere, in a country that actually had enjoyed sovereign statehood during the interwar period and that became emancipated from foreign rule long ago. (This is not to mention that the UPA might serve oc-

asionally as an ally to Wehrmacht, but was never part of it or the SS – the armed wing of the Nazi party). The free subjectivity of Euromaidan revealed itself in its arbitrary appropriation of the famous UPA greeting “Glory to Ukraine! – Glory to the heroes!” without feeling obliged to import the whole complex of twentieth-century identity-fixed nationalism associated with the UPA legacy (a point elaborated by several contributors to the forum). When Russian propaganda attempted to “troll” new Ukrainians as “Banderites” for repeating the old “fascist” slogan, they responded creatively, not reactively (by explaining, denying, apologizing, or any other form of enforced “troll-feeding”).

Ukrainian Jews immediately produced the mem “Yid-Banderite” and actually developed it into a social identity that many proudly accepted. This is just one episode in a series of creative responses to Russian propaganda that demonstrate more than a good sense of humor: the identity-indifferent, value-oriented imagined community of new Ukraine is capable of accommodating any slur – on its own terms, leaving its adversaries in total confusion. The most recent example was provided by yet another insanity broadcasted by Russian state TV insinuating that



Mitya Gerasimov, leader of the Kyiv-based Pushkin! Klezmer Band, in his usual Yid-Banderite t-shirt. Photo: Francis Mazuet.

Ukrainian volunteers were promised a plot of land and two slaves (*sic!*) for fighting in Donbas,¹⁰ followed by the whirlwind of hilarious “creative interpretations” of this news in the Ukrainian section of the Internet.

It is important to stress that this reaction to Russia’s attempts to seize the initiative (through imposing its own absurd agenda) may be spontaneous, but not unconscious. This became completely clear when President Poroshenko appeared in public sporting the “Dill” insignia: this was an official response to the public campaign in Russia smearing Ukrainians as “ukrops” (literally, “dills”). New Ukrainians can call themselves Yid-Banderites, Dills, or Khokhly, because they do not follow some preset fixed identities

¹⁰ 70 let nazad Sovetskie voiska osvobodili Ukrainu ot fashistov // 2014. November 2. <https://www.1tv.ru/news/world/271048>.

and national roles – instead, they negotiate new values and acceptable forms of social interaction. This is why they cannot be effectively “trolled” by identity-centered Russian propaganda, and this is what sets them apart not only from subalterns (people without articulated subjectivity) but also from most uncompromised anticolonial rebels. Ukrainians do not define themselves by negating everything “colonial” (thus effectively remaining within the hold of colonially imposed mental frames). They are creatively minding their business, inventing a new country for themselves, and when they have to respond to outside pressure, they frame the response in their own terms.



President Poroshenko presents the “Dill” insignia in Mariupol commenting: “Let them call us ‘Ukrops’, because UkrOp stands for ‘Ukrains’kii opir’ [Ukrainian resistance].” Source: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/09/8/7037102/>.

Today, former volunteers are serving as advisers to the president and defense minister, as staff for newly created departments in ministries, and they are elected to the parliament. There are numerous opportunities to help – the key question is whether people are willing to step forward and help – and, more important, to define the venues and terms of help.

Interestingly, according to the World Giving Index (WGI) compiled on the basis of data provided by Gallup, in 2013 Ukraine ranked 103 out of 157 countries in the cumulative index: ahead of Russia (ranked 123), but

This is not just a figure of speech: “they” stands for a majority of Ukrainian citizens who can be quantified in various social situations and interactions. Nothing demonstrates the material power of subjectivity better than the scale and diversity of activities of the volunteer movement in Ukraine. Arguably, the very process of state building after February 2014 has been stimulated, guided, and even staffed by grassroots citizens’ initiative. People could contribute by bringing drinking water to Maidan or volunteering to fight Russian militia and troops in Donbas; carrying military helmets across the border in their personal luggage to donate to the underequipped Ukrainian military or assembling radio-controlled flying models as impromptu drones for the army; accommodating refugees from occupied territories or

still lagging behind 10 other post-Soviet countries.¹¹ Specifically, Ukraine was 26th in terms of the amount of volunteer time, but only 112th when it came to “helping strangers.” A recent representative sociological survey revealed a dramatic sea change in Ukraine: between May and October 2014, almost 80 percent of Ukrainians donated their time, money, or property to the army or refugees from the occupied territories.¹² Three percent of the respondents were “professional volunteers” – coordinators, who collected donations and personally delivered them to the war zone. Contrary to the expectations of the classical model of national mobilization, city dwellers are less active in voluntarily contributing to the national cause (still accounting for a formidable 40 percent) than villagers (86 percent). Two age cohorts demonstrated particular civic activity: people ages fifty to sixty (41 percent of all donors and volunteers) and those from eighteen to twenty-nine (34 percent). This is just an example of how the hypothesis of the mass-scale expression of an individual civic position regarding a personally identified cause of communal importance (shorthanded as “subjectivity”) can be verified, quantitatively assessed, and specified in aggregated social profiles.¹³

How does this postcolonial and post-postmodern (i.e., post-relativist and post-cynical) collective subjectivity differs from “regular” national subjectivity, twentieth-century style? Several contributors to the forum (first of all, Alexander Osipian and Andriy Portnov) mention the significance of hybridity as a new phenomenon in Ukraine, or rather as a familiar phenomenon that has changed its modality – from a sign of marginality and parochialism to a trendy and mainstream personal quality. “Yid-Banderites” can be viewed by some as carnival exotics, but the overwhelming role of new Russian-language and culturally Russian Ukrainian patriotism and nationalism cannot be dismissed. The project “Information Resistance”

¹¹ See World Giving Index full table // Charities Aid Foundation. World Giving Index 2013: A Global View of Giving Trends. December 2013. http://www.cafonline.org/pdf/WorldGivingIndex2013_1374AWEB.pdf.

¹² Pochti 33% ukrainsev perevodili den'gi armii. October 21, 2014 // <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/10/21/7041506>.

¹³ Another recent poll conducted in 110 localities across the country revealed that over 20 percent of Ukrainians participated in Euromaidan protests across the country, one way or another: 5 percent personally protested in Kyiv, 6 percent – in other Ukrainian cities, 9 percent provided them with food, clothes, and medications. This group reveals a distinctive social composition and a characteristic spectrum of political opinions. See V Maidane prinimal uchastie kazhdyi piatyi ukrainets – opros // Zerkalo Nedeli. 2014. November 19. http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/v-maydane-prinimal-uchastie-kazhdyy-pyatyiy-ukrainec-opros-159240_.html.

launched on March 2 by Dmitry Tymchuk on his Facebook account had by mid-April close to 80,000 registered followers (the number of unregistered readers is likely much higher; today he has over 220,000 followers).¹⁴ This Russian-language resource, equally popular with Ukrainian and Russian speakers, embodies the postcolonial nature of Ukrainian revolution as a claim for independent subjectivity. At the time of the general confusion in the wake of the Russian invasion in Crimea, this was the only efficient form of resistance: not by military force (nonexistent at the time in Ukraine), but by refusal to follow the lead of the Russian media (either by broadcasting them or refuting their interpretations, while still remaining captives of the externally imposed agenda). As a speaker for the gradually increasing group of associates, Tymchuk introduced his own format of news aggregation and presentation and soon became a key *newsmaker* – not just a commentator. While the role of Facebook and other Internet media in the Ukrainian revolution is a special topic (part of it is discussed in detail in the articles focused on the Maidan period, by Volodymyr Kulyk and, especially, by Jennifer Dickinson), here it is important to stress the very “hybrid” identity of the postcolonial rebellion by Tymchuk or another cult Facebook personality, commander of the volunteer battalion Donbas known by his revolutionary alias Semen Semenchenko (close to 187,000 registered followers today), or the popular journalist and editor of the influential Censor.Net news Web portal, Yuri Butusov (over 87,000 registered followers), or the leader of the major volunteer association Wings of Phoenix, Yuri Biriukov (over 63,000 registered followers), or the Jewish spokesman for the Right Sector Borislav Bereza (close to 73,000 followers) or the deputy head of the Dnipropetrovsk Regional Administration, Borys Filatov (over 105,000 followers). The list can be continued, yielding some interesting prosopographic regularities,¹⁵ but here it is important to stress the profoundly hybrid nature of the uncompromised self-proclaimed Ukraininess of these people: though they admit belonging to Russian culture, they are comfortable in the Ukrainian-language environment and consciously embrace Ukrainian “ethnic” culture. Bilinguals in more than one sense, they are so confident in this intermediary (hybrid) position that they do not feel pressured prove their Ukraininess by switching to the Ukrainian language in public.

¹⁴ How Dmitry Tymchuk Broke the Russian Blogosphere // GlobalVoices. 2014. April 23. <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2014/04/23/how-dmitry-tymchuk-broke-the-russian-blogosphere>.

¹⁵ All of them were born between 1972 and 1976, raised in a Russian-language social milieu, received higher education, belonged to lower-middle-class or middle-class strata, and so on.

In this perspective, the unexpected transformation of Dnipropetrovsk – arguably a no less “Russian” or even “Soviet” city than Donetsk – into a champion of new Ukrainian patriotism and a major factor of public war mobilization efforts appears in a new light. The decisive role in this transformation of the governor (oligarch and leader of the Dnipropetrovsk Jewish community, Igor Kolomoisky) and his deputies (Gennadii Korban and Boris Filatov) has been broadly acknowledged. Their motivations are usually explained by their personal convictions and values, particular business interests, and political rivalry with Donetsk elites. While no doubt plausible, these explanations do not account for the key factor of the “Dnipropetrovsk phenomenon”: the genuine popularity of Kolomoisky and company in Dnipropetrovsk and across Ukraine precisely in their capacity as leaders of the Ukrainian antiseparatist fight. Could it be that the Russo-Jewish Kolomoisky team spontaneously embodied the very essence of new Ukrainian hybridity, which made their example so attractive to many people in Ukraine? After all, the social group that can be tentatively defined as “Soviet Jews” was the most consistent representative of hybridity in the twentieth century. In the nationalist social imagination obsessed with defining fixed identities, they were perceived as marginal and parochial – precisely because every hybridity (linguistic, cultural, or economic) was equated with backwardness. The closer a group approached some uncompromised “ideal type” the higher its social status was. Most of the Soviet Jews were indifferent to Judaism, the majority of those born after World War II did not speak Yiddish (and certainly not Hebrew). Yet, their Jewishness was maintained not only because of outside stigmatization (a formal “nationality” registered in passports), but also because people voluntarily and creatively chose this loosely and very selectively defined self-identification. Soviet Jews both reified and defied all the old stereotypes of some normative Jewishness: they were courageous warriors and conmen, career-making opportunists and artists, good drinkers of vodka and people with poor health. They chose to (or were forced to) pursue their individual interests as Jews, so their Jewishness was essentially a synonym for hybridity, making sense of it as a form of the individual subjectivity of the otherwise regular “Soviets.” In revolutionary Ukraine, the marginal type of Soviet Jews has become surprisingly relevant as an archetype of the new, “post-identity” form of solidarity. This is why Russian-speaking “Soviet Jew” Korban and “Pskov peasant” and self-proclaimed “Zionist” Filatov have established close relationships with the charismatic leader of the Right Sector, a true Banderite Dmytro Yarosh – something that blows the mind of “identity Nazis” in Russia, Is-

rael, or Germany (or in Ukraine, for that matter). Russo-Jewish-Banderites is just one of many productive combinations accommodated by the new Ukrainian hybridity – which is at once political and cultural, regional and confessional (something that cannot be understood from within the obsolete social imagination of the twentieth century).

It is important to stress that the project of hybrid Ukrainess does not necessarily threaten but may even greatly enhance the cultural (“ethnic”) component of it. A national canon, twentieth-century style, is always an arbitrary (selective and repressive) nomination of certain local characteristics to the role of the compulsory national standard. A regional dialect becomes the linguistic norm of “high” language marginalizing other dialects; one type of local dress, repertoire of songs, or cuisine would rise to the status of national importance, making all the rest objects of ethnographic research, at best. Even “ethnic Ukrainians” themselves are so diverse that a single mandatory national canon has to be discriminatory toward some. At the moment, a model of culture in a hybrid nation remains nonexistent because Ukraine is still elaborating this project in real time, while leading world theorists are lagging far behind the revolutionary sociocultural transformations there.

Despite its obsession with an extensive methodological exploration of every nuanced social status and interaction, postcolonial theory is astonishingly underdeveloped when it comes to hybrid identities. There is a widespread misperception that the authoritative contribution by Homi Bhabha provides an exhaustive reflection on historical hybridity,¹⁶ but even this tradition (essentially denying hybridity the right to subjectivity of its own) has not been effectively engaged in empirical studies.¹⁷ The quite substantial body of research on hybrid imperial social personae and “imperial biographies” that is produced within new imperial history not only “normalizes” hybridity but demonstrates its mainstream role in prenational and anational societies.¹⁸ The unfolding story of the Ukrainian postcolonial revolution – arguably, the first of this kind ever – provides a unique opportunity for postcolonial scholars to upgrade their theoretical models. Dynamic hybridity not only offers a practical political solution for a heterogeneous and multifaceted society such

¹⁶ Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London, 1994.

¹⁷ An important exception is Satoshi Mizutani. *Hybridity and History: A Critical Reflection on Homi K. Bhabha’s Post-Historical Thoughts* // *Ab Imperio*. 2013. No. 4. Pp. 27-48.

¹⁸ Articles on various aspects of this problem are published in virtually every issue of *Ab Imperio*, while in 2009 all four issues of the journal were structured by the annual theme “Homo Imperii: The Imperial Situation of Multiple Temporalities and Heterogeneous Space”.

as Ukraine (or other post-Soviet countries), but also opens new horizons for European and North American societies, where the original promise of multiculturalism and affirmative action did not live up to the original high expectations. Multiculturalism is framed by the essentialist, nation-centered twentieth-century discourse of fixed identities. The hybridity espoused by new Ukrainians demonstrates a truly postcolonial emancipation of one's subjectivity unconstrained by alien hegemonic will as well as by the golden chains of (usually recently invented) communal traditions with their cult of "authenticity" and rigid scenarios of identity politics.

With the revolution of 2014, the postmodern ended in Ukraine. We still do not know how to conceptualize this new reality. From the outside, this brave new world looks like high Modernity (but not compromised by the Eros of the state and the supremacy of the "national body"): with self-sacrificial heroes, collective improvisations, and complex forms of self-organization. Most importantly, even the most radical social and personal experiments – manifestations of emancipated subjectivity – are perceived without the familiar postmodern sneer of cynical skepticism: critical reflection is focused on publicly expressed ideas and values, not on the "identities" (and personalities) of people who dare to express them.

"Postcolonial revolution" is an analytical construct that helps scholars to reconstruct the logic of events and (ideally) to predict the responses of the object of analysis to different situations. Like a "bourgeois revolution" or "national liberation movement," it is not a "thing" – just our more or less accurate description of it, and only from one angle. This description surpasses other alternative explanations, thus taking us one step closer to grasping "the essence" of the phenomenon that most neutrally describes itself as "Euromaidan Ukraine." It is clear now why observers think of "national revolution" in connection with Euromaidan: because it has forged a new community of self-conscious belonging, which is "nation" (but the new hybrid Ukrainian nation is very different from most classical examples). Euromaidan appears to be "bourgeois democratic" because, historically, self-conscious civic subjects belonged to the upper classes. What is bourgeois about the Kyiv taxi drivers who carried passengers to Freedom Square in Kyiv for free when public transportation was blocked in the downtown, or about the villagers all over Ukraine donating to the revolutionary army? Euromaidan is anti-Soviet (it toppled Lenin statues throughout the country) because it is post-Soviet and refuses to borrow ideas and symbols from the past in order to outline the future – but not in any Cold War-period sense.

To the citizens of Ukraine it is largely irrelevant how a bunch of scholars will label what is for them the everyday life, everyday referendum, and everyday struggle. But to scholars themselves – and all other bystanders commenting on Ukraine – this is truly the last judgment. If the model of “postcolonial revolution” is correct, this means that Ukraine has opened up new historical horizons and is already living in the future. Its adversaries get stuck in the past, and technically – from a historian’s prospective – are dead already, just like a chicken with its head cut off running in circles (and – it is hard not to add – rattling the sabre and waving a flag). Everybody has the right to disapprove of the Ukrainian revolution and wish bad for the country – one should just realize that by doing this in the name of reviving and freezing some mostly imagined past, s/he is getting locked in a different temporality with no future. (The centrality of futurism and emancipated subjectivity for the Ukrainian revolution is confirmed by the obsession of its enemies with the psychotic desire to substitute reality or the desirable future with an idealized past.¹⁹)

There is no grand superhuman “History” to determine the fates of individuals and peoples, deciding who “got stuck” and who got a pass to the future: all are subject of their own fortunes. It is just that some rise up to the role of self-conscious subjects of common history, and others voluntarily surrender their own subjectivity to become the slaves of predetermined identities and scenarios.

¹⁹ Thus, Igor Girkin (Strelkov), who began the separatist insurrection in April, is a renowned historical reenactor and author of conservative fantasy fiction. Fedor Berezin, currently the deputy war minister of the “Donetsk Republic,” is the author of two dozen novels in the genre of Russian nationalist military sci-fi. Cf. Dmitry Bykov. *Voina pisatelei // Novaia gazeta*. 2014. No. 74. July 9. <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/64337.html>. Bykov mentions a few other Ukrainian and Russian writers of conservative sci-fi and fantasy that wholeheartedly sided with counterrevolution, for some reason omitting the dean of Russian fantasts, Sergei Lukianenko, prominent for his vicious anti-Ukrainism. Bykov attempts to place Arsen Avakov, the interior minister in Ukrainian revolutionary government, in the same context of fantasts attempting to rewrite the future – because Avakov used to be the main sponsor and organizer of the leading festival of sci-fi writers in Russian language, the Star Bridge, that took place every year in Kharkiv, Ukraine, from 1999 to 2012. Bykov misses the principal difference: Avakov organized the event in reality, while conservative fantasts dreamed about the idealized past in the future. When Avakov joined the government to build a new Ukraine, former festival participants rose up against this unknown future – in the name of the rigidly predetermined historical scenario that was devoid of any spontaneous subjectivity.

The Stance of Outside Observers

“What will happen to Russia?”
She doesn’t answer, but looks at me carefully.
I wait with trepidation.²⁰
“Nothing.”²¹

Despite providing important information on different aspects of Euro-maidan and post-Maidan developments and invaluable insights concerning the interpretation of these events, the forum put together by *Ab Imperio* focuses mainly on the response to the Ukrainian challenge by the international community of experts on the region, formerly known as “Russianists.” One year after the outbreak of Euromaidan, we see that the Ukrainian revolution has put to the test not just the political order in Europe, but – to a much greater degree – the reputation of intellectuals who are professionally involved in analyzing Ukraine or revolutionary politics. Several forum participants – particularly Sergei Zhuk, Yaroslav Hrytsak, and Anna Veronika Wendland – express their disillusionment and frustration over the stance taken vis-à-vis Ukraine by professional historians and public intellectuals in the United States, Russia, and Germany. It seems that the main reason for this frustration results not from political disagreements per se or conflicting scholarly interpretations, but from encountering an explicit refusal of very intelligent people to put their minds to work rigorously. What really hurts is not an opposing opinion, but barely masked superficial indifference. Such is the effect of the Ukrainian postcolonial revolution: the main adversary of the self-expression of subjectivity is not another subjectivity, but its absence.

This probably explains the otherwise inexplicable solidarity of West European and Russian left-wing activists not with the Ukrainian anti-kleptocratic popular uprising with a strong anticolonial component, but with explicitly imperialist and chauvinist Russian aggression. This is what makes quite a number of American historians side with Putin’s regime: they are in the “business of identities,” and when pressed to choose between familiar scenarios structuring their field and conceptual revolution brought about by Ukrainian events – they choose “stability” (not unlike their Russian counterparts). Otherwise, they would have to reconsider their ideas

²⁰ Vladimir Sorokin. *Day of the Oprichnik: A Novel* / Transl. Jamey Gambrell. New York, 2011. P. 119.

²¹ Russian original: “nichego” (V. Sorokin. *Den’ oprichnika*. Moscow, 2008. P. 141). The 2011 English edition translates the answer as “It’ll be all right,” which is misleading.

of what constitutes Russianness and Jewishness, fascism and nationalism, revolution and reaction. They forget that operating with conventional categories and models is only part of the institutionalized *scholarly* process. The other part is essential for preventing the *process* from succumbing into shallow performativity: those conventions should be revised and re-configured from time to time, and the Ukrainian revolution has presented a unique opportunity for “participant observation” of many key historical processes in the making.

The position of Russian scholars on Ukraine is the least interesting to analyze, as they do not try to preserve even the status quo in the face of rapidly changing reality (including the newest scholarship on Ukraine), but wholeheartedly succumb to excessive archaism and intellectual scarcity. With rare exceptions, the level of expertise on Ukraine has deteriorated in Russia to a state beyond any intellectual relevance. Ideological censorship and political pressure encourage people in humanities and social studies to profess performativity and “ornamentalism,” reproducing formal academic procedures without engaging in truly critical thinking. Without producing original meaning of its own – how can Russian scholarship understand the innovative meaning generated by the Other?

Impotent scholarship is just the tip of the iceberg, as the general public discourse in Russia demonstrates the same fundamental lack of intellectual productivity and distinctive personal subjectivity. The dominant discourse explains everything – from the Ukrainian crisis to Russian domestic problems – through the trope of “foreign agency,” whether the United States, cunning Kremlin manipulators, or aliens from outer space. Within this discourse it seems plausible that protesters spent weeks in the bitter cold on the Kyiv Maidan because they were paid for it, that volunteers took up arms to defend their country in exchange for “a plot of land and two slaves” – any external stimuli are perceived as more credible by default than an explanation through subjective motivation. People just do not believe in someone’s else personal agency, sincerity, and determination – because being unaware of their own subjectivity, they do not recognize the subjectivity of others. Parochial cynicism is employed to cover the profound frustration caused by the events people do not want to control – and therefore cannot control.

Even the most self-conscious liberal segment of the demoralized Russian educated society is hopelessly stuck in the discourse of identities. Moreover, liberalism (from the Latin *liber* – “free”) in Russia has acquired the Philistine “wise” stance, announcing “neutrality” as one of the “natural

rights.” In practice, neutrality means zero subjectivity and the stake on fixed identities that are entitled to certain privileges and restricted to certain forms of expression (just as legal estates under the old regime). Neutrality as a broadly recognized sign of respectability has different faces: journalists are expected to be “objective,” scholars are supposed to remain within “purely academic” discourse, politicians should not demonstrate any inclination toward “extremism.” The psychotic fixation on neutrality should be concealing the traumatic realization of the void of subjectivity (in the forum, Denis Dubrovkin shares his view on how this trauma played out in Donbas – structurally really more reminiscent of Russia than Ukraine). A society that is not a common sphere of contesting and negotiating individual subjectivities is nonexistent in “objective reality,” and no legally impeccable “cadasters” of fixed social identities and references to past common fates can compensate for this emptiness. The postcolonial revolution of subjectivity in Ukraine threatens Russian society by the sheer contrast it unwillingly produced – between vibrant life and the soulless (but not yet decomposed) social body. The problem is not that a majority of Russians (the exact number is debatable) hate Ukraine and believe the state propaganda of unheard of idiocy and crudeness (which is possible only because they want to believe it). The tragedy (for Russia) is that they are doing this for no personal reason, just because these people have no subjectivity as members of society, beyond immediate personal interests. Is this a case of “demodernizing” individuals with full political rights and their complete schooling into becoming subalterns?

It is in this perspective that the seemingly strange slogan of the Russian opposition politician Aleksei Navalny should be perceived: “The Final Battle between Good and Neutrality.”²² Only through the prism of Ukrainian revolution can the “opportunist” tactics of Navalny (so confusing to Russian liberals – prisoners of identity politics) be best understood: his readiness to cooperate with nationalists, liberals, and communists is but a soft version of the creative hybridity of new Ukrainians that gradually transforms the political sphere in the country. Thus, the personal choice of Russo-Yid-Banderites received official political sanction recently when the chairman of the Ukrainian parliament, Alexander Turchinov, proposed that newly elected MPs should take an oath during the swearing-in ceremony simultaneously to “three respectful representatives of different parts of Ukraine”: the ex-member of the “pro-Russian” Party of Regions and Jewish activist

²² See <https://navalny.com>.

Efim Zviagilskii, the leader of Crimean Tatars Mustafa Dzhemilev, and Yuri Shukhevych, son of the supreme commander of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).²³ This controversial idea (that provoked heated debates) has nothing to do with “political correctness,” “internationalism,” or “multiculturalism” because there are no fixed groups to claim representation on the grounds of some fixed quota. These people just represent the most characteristic faces of the same hybrid Ukraininess defined through the solidary expression of individual subjectivity – quite in line with the often-quoted but misunderstood 1882 dictum of Ernest Renan (“nation is a daily referendum”). It is just that the twentieth century accustomed us to fake referendums arranged around phony agendas imposed by politicians. In revolutionary Ukraine, people define the political agenda for themselves as a true (and almost daily) referendum.

The case of Navalny proves that Russian society is not alien to processes unfolding in Ukraine, which, however, have very bleak prospects of success. In Ukraine, it took at least a decade (since the Orange Revolution of 2004) of intensive public debates to collectively produce that new feeling (not even “understanding” yet) of the solidarity of individual subjectivities. The discussion gradually expanded from academic and semi-academic periodicals to the general media, then to the Internet, from blogs to Facebook posts, and finally to brief Twitter messages understood by everyone without the need to properly contextualize the ideas expressed.

It should not come as a surprise then when a Russian-language Facebook post by the commander of the volunteer Donbas battalion, Semen Semchenko, almost verbatim (even though perhaps unintentionally) quotes from the Ukrainian-language column by historian Yaroslav Hrytsak published four months earlier. Despite their social and cultural (and political) differences, both of them belong to the common sphere of hybrid yet solidary subjectivity structured by common ideals and values.

If offered a post in Cabinet of Ministers, I would have opted for Minister of Transport. And first thing, I would have lowered for certain categories of population the cost of train tickets west to east, and east to west. ...So they could walk the streets of Lviv, get rid of the fear of Banderites, and just see what a beautiful and hospitable city it is. ...Nations are created not by language but by everyday experience.

²³ Eks-regionalu, synu komandira UPA i lideru krymskikh tatar predlagaiut vmeste privesti Radu k prisyage // UNIAN. 2014. November 20. <http://www.unian.net/politics/1011910-eks-regionalu-syinu-komandira-upa-i-lideru-krymskih-tatar-predlagayut-vmeste-privesti-radu-k-prisyage.html>.

Therefore, it is necessary to “sew Ukraine together” by trains and cheap airlines. Because stereotypes parasitize on distances.²⁴

[Battalion] “Donbas” is Ukraine. All of it. Lviv and Rivno, Simferopol and Donetsk, and Lisichansk, and Kyiv. Lviv and Donetsk with Luhansk should give a hand to each other and sew the country together. When we are tricked into confronting each other, told stories about Banderites and bandits from Donbas – the whole Ukraine suffers.²⁵

At least ten years of debating values and goals cannot be “telescoped” to a few months of propaganda even by the most talented and progressive political leaders such as Navalny. To make such a dialogue possible in Russia ten years from now, the public discussion should have been initiated yesterday. It was not, and if it does not begin now, the only hope for Russian intellectuals will be the promise given in April 2014 by Dnipropetrovsk Russo-Banderite and Zionist vice-governor, Borys Filatov:

We should become an alternative to what Moscow was in the former Soviet Union. We are simply obliged to develop relationships with all brotherly peoples who threw off the yoke of Moscow: the Balts, Moldovans, Azerbaijanis, Georgians. It is to Kyiv, not Moscow, that Russian-speaking citizens of these countries should look. ... Ukraine should become the second home for the Russian (*russkaia*) intelligentsia, business, and professionals, who are suffocating under the KGB boot of the bald Fuhrer.

* * *

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SUMMARY

In the introductory essay opening the thematic forum *Ukraine and the Crisis of “Russian Studies”*: *Participant Observation of History in the Making*, Ilya Gerasimov reviews the most common approaches to interpreting the Ukrainian political crisis of 2014. Drawing on the materials of the forum, he then suggests that the concept of “postcolonial revolution” is better suited to integrate all the key features of the phenomenon in question within one

²⁴ Yaroslav Hrytsak. Aktualne // Gazeta.ua. 2014. May 1. <http://gazeta.ua/articles/grycak-jaroslav/aktualne/555008>.

²⁵ Semen Semenchenko. Facebook post, September 10, 2014 // <https://www.facebook.com/dostali.hvatit/posts/812317225469720>.

explanatory model: its democratic potential, the highly hybrid nature of the national community produced by the Euromaidan revolution, and the very fact that this community did not precede the revolution but became an evolving product of it. Most important, the revolution is characterized by the astonishingly persistent manifestation of people's subjectivity. The Ukrainian revolution is a postcolonial revolution because it is all about the people acquiring their own voice, and in the process of this self-assertive act forging a new Ukrainian nation as a community of negotiated solidary action by self-conscious individuals. Gerasimov concludes with surveying the influence of the Ukrainian revolution on the international field of Russian Studies, and how it put to the test the convictions of those who preach a leftist and even revolutionary political agenda. Surprisingly many leftists in Europe and the United States (as well as in Russia) have sided with the kleptocratic and imperialist Russian regime against the revolutionary new Ukrainian nation. Gerasimov explains this by referring to the key distinction advanced in the essay by Yaroslav Hrytsak published in the forum: the distinction between identity-centered and value-oriented approaches. Many experts in the region and left-leaning intellectuals prefer to support Russian aggression against Ukraine because in this way they can keep unchanged their worldview structured by taxonomies of fixed identities: "Russia as a main antifascist force," "Ukrainian fascists," "American imperialists," and so on. A critical deconstruction of familiar clichés implies that one has to enter uncharted waters and embrace a new, unfamiliar reality of post-postmodern society and postcolonial revolution.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Во введении к форуму "Украина и кризис 'русистики': включенное наблюдение исторического процесса" Илья Герасимов кратко разбирает наиболее распространенные подходы, объясняющие украинский политический кризис 2014 г. Опираясь на материалы форума, он предлагает модель "постколониальной революции," как наиболее адекватно отражающую основные черты анализируемого феномена: демократический потенциал, крайне гибридную природу национального сообщества, возникшего после революции Евромайдана, а также сам факт, что это сообщество не предшествовало революции, но стало ее эволюционирующим результатом. Главной же отличительной чертой этой революции стало удивительно последовательное проявление

субъектности людей. Украинская революция – постколониальная революция, поскольку основным ее результатом стало обретение людьми собственного голоса. В процессе этого самоутверждения формируется новая украинская нация как сообщество договорной солидарности сознающих свою уникальную субъектность личностей. В завершение Герасимов обращается к теме влияния украинской революции на международную русистику и тех, кто декларирует левые и даже революционные взгляды. На удивление, многие левые в Европе, США и России предпочли солидаризироваться с клептократическим и империалистическим российским режимом против новой, революционной украинской нации. Герасимов объясняет это обстоятельство, ссылаясь на ключевое различие, выдвинутое Ярославом Грыцаком, – между фиксацией на социальной идентичности и ориентацией на общие ценности. Многие эксперты по региону и левые интеллектуалы предпочитают поддерживать российскую агрессию против Украины, потому что таким образом они могут сохранить неизменной картину мира, сформированную таксономией привычных и жестких идентичностей: “Россия – главный враг фашизма”, “украинские фашисты”, “американские империалисты” и т.п. Критическая деконструкция знакомых клише привела бы к необходимости принять незнакомую новую реальность постпостмодерного общества и постколониальной революции.