



“Death to Muscovites!”: Perceptions of Russian Civilians in Wartime Kyiv

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how Ukrainian civilians define the “enemy” within the everyday Russian civilian sphere in the wake of the 2022 full-scale invasion. Ukrainian political rhetoric has often portrayed the Russian public as a homogenous collective complicit in the invasion, frequently making statements to the effect that “there are no good Russians”. Drawing on interviews conducted in Kyiv in the spring of 2025, my research sets out to assess whether this image of Russian civilians as a “total enemy” has been internalized into the collective imagination of Ukrainian civilians. The research engages closely with the theoretical frameworks developed by Daniel Rothbart and Karina Korostelina, who apply social identity theory to protracted conflict contexts. Against the grain of much previous enmity research, I used the individual expression of enmity as my primary unit of analysis, before observing trends in individual expression which are crystallised into collective enmity. I also drew on the work of Herbert Kelman and Daniel Bar-Tal, whose work has explored the “sociopsychological infrastructure” surrounding enmity (Bar-Tal, 2009 : 1430), and how this infrastructure shapes national identity consolidation. While there were clear trends towards totalizing enmity expressed by my respondents, they made clear structural and moral differentiations in their depictions of Russian society. One of the primary takeaways from my research was the ambivalence expressed both between and within the responses of my respondents, which primarily seemed to be centred around the Russian totalitarian political context, and the lack of agency of Russian civilians. This research does not seek to make objective assessments of the Russian civilian population, it is focussed on Ukrainian perceptions of this population.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2024, as I refined my topic for this research project, I was staying with my partner in a flat in Northern Kyiv. Upon asking for the Wi-Fi password, I found our flatmate had set it as “*smert’ moskalem*¹”, or “death to Muscovites”. The phrase was a variation on the more commonly used “*smert’ voroham*”, or “*death to enemies*”, one of the lines from the now common call-and-response salute popularized by Ukrainian partisans in the early 20th century, and re-popularised since the 2014 invasion of Crimea : “Glory to Ukraine – Glory to the heroes! Glory to the nation – Death to enemies!” (Kaniewski, 2018). But who exactly was *the enemy*? The Kremlin, and the Russian military no doubt. But where do ‘everyday’ Russian civilians fit into the equation?

Many Ukrainians have family in Russia, with some 49% of respondents to a 2011 poll by the Levada centre² stating so (Levada Centre, 2011). Many had friends before 2022. Many have spent a good deal of their professional life in Russia and had divided their time between the two countries (Factum Group, 2022), including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Marriages between Ukrainian and Russian citizens were not uncommon. Furthermore, 17.2% of the population of Ukraine identified as ethnically Russian in 2001 (there has been no adequate census since). As of 2010, some 1.4% of Russian nationals identified as ethnically Ukrainian, making them the third largest ethnic group in the Russian Federation, of a population of nearly 144 million³. Many more identified as being of mixed heritage. More recent statistics have been compromised by the occupation of Ukrainian territories, but nonetheless speak to the deep entanglement of these two communities.

Yet, in spite of the deep historical entanglement between the two countries, the 2022 full-

¹ It should be noted that the term *Moskal* historically had a different implication; “In historical works from the 15th to the 19th century, the lexeme *moskal* did not yet have an ethnically marked connotation and the sema of ‘enemy’, as it was a noun to signify the mixed army of the Tsar of Moscow. But it was the Russian army led by ‘Moscow generals’ that contributed to the destruction of one of the most famous formations of Medieval Europe, Zaporizhzhya Sich, the Cossack republic, which became a symbol of Ukrainian statehood.” (Kuzmenko, 2022 : 18)

² Note that the Levada Centre is a Russian research body, and may have a vested interest in misrepresentation. However, a new poll by the Ukrainian Factum Group in March 2022 found that 54% of Ukrainian respondents had family, former friends or former colleagues in Russia.

³ More recent censuses include Ukrainians living in occupied territories.

scale invasion of Ukraine saw an almost total collapse of dialogue⁴ between Ukrainian and Russian civilian populations (Ash & Shapovalov, 2025). Many of those from regions with the strongest historical links to Russia, such as Kharkiv Oblast, have been observed by researchers in the field as systematically deleting all Russian contacts from their phones (Ibid). A woman I met in Kharkiv with family in Russia⁵ had cut off all contact after the full-scale invasion. She did not hesitate to refer to the totality of Russian civilians as “evil”, and emphasised that the fact that she had Russian family did not hold her back from saying so.

Since the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian political rhetoric has generally flattened the Russian civilian population into a homogenous mass (Ishchenko, 2024). Statements such as “good Russians do not exist”, as claimed Iryna Podolyak, a former member of parliament, have become commonplace (Podolyak, 2022). I heard another former member of parliament give a speech at a private event, in which she said “Russians are the rot in our society. Every society has rot, and they are ours.” Here, the entirety of the Russian civilian population is ostensibly portrayed as a collective enemy, a “total enemy” (Thorup, 2015). While my research focusses on the *everyday* Russian civilian population, it should be noted that the Russian opposition also often seems to be placed in this enemy category for their failure to sufficiently speak in defence of Ukrainian sovereignty, instead focussing primarily on domestic issues⁶ (Kondrat, 2024). The Ukrainian media platform *Svidomi* released an essay arguing “Good Russians’ are dangerous...(they are) the enemies of our future...poisonous miasma permeates the entire Russian culture” (Kebuladze, 2023), arguing that the Russian opposition is not to be engaged with, the tone reflecting a theme running in wartime Ukrainian media.

⁴ Peter Pomerantsev has noted the existence of informal influence operations in the early days of the war; organised by activists who attempted mass phone calls to Russian civilians (Pomerantsev, 2024). These efforts dissipated as surveillance methods and safety concerns in Russia intensified, and activists were exhausted by the realisation that only appealing to Russians’ immediate self-interests prevented those they called from soon hanging up.

⁵ She explained that she had encountered discomfort realising that they held conflicting opinions about the ongoing hybrid warfare in the Donbas around 2018, but she decided to simply not discuss politics with her Russian family.

⁶ Most are deeply sceptical of Alexi Navalny, for instance, who after the annexation of Crimea stated it would be impossible for the region to be returned to Ukraine, and built his initial following on far right rhetoric with elements of Russian imperialist ideology.



Fig 1 : A patch for sale on an online marketplace. (Source : magnitik.ua)

This construction of a rival society as a “total enemy” is a commonplace occurrence in political rhetoric in wartime or post-war contexts, especially in countries engaged in protracted or existential conflicts with their neighbours (Rieber & Kelly, 1991). This generally filters down to the private beliefs of the civilian sphere, and can become a cornerstone of national identity, as has been observed by scholars in the Israeli-Palestinian case (Bar-Tal, 2007; Kelman, 1999).

My research sets out to assess whether this image of Russian society/civilians as a “total enemy” has been internalized into the collective imagination of Ukrainian civilians (as a “collective enmity”), most principally inquiring *how do Ukrainians define the “enemy” within the civilian sphere?* This was refined from my original, broader question *how do Ukrainians perceive ‘everyday’ Russian civilians?*⁷ As sub-questions guiding my research I also inquired *how do Ukrainians perceive and articulate the complicity of ‘everyday’ Russian civilians in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine?* Furthermore, addressing the problem of totalitarianism, which I will expand on below, *how do Ukrainians articulate the mechanics of totalitarianism in the Russian context?*

⁷ It should be noted that for ease of expression, from this point onwards, unless stipulated otherwise, when referring to Russian ‘civilians’, I am referring only to ‘everyday’ civilians – I am not speaking to the political or ‘elite’ class. My intention was to delimit the scope of research to those of Russian nationality, primarily those living on the territory of the Russian Federation, with some limited discussion of the Russian diaspora – but I wished to leave the interpretation of ‘Russian’ civilians within this delimitation open to my interviewees. I should also note that my research does not investigate ethnic Russians who are Ukrainian nationals.

Historical context : entangled identities

The Russo-Ukrainian instance has many of its own unique dynamics. Historically, Ukrainian and Russian identities are deeply entangled, with both societies and politics tracing their origin to the Kyivan Rus’⁸. Even though distinct cultures and nations have since emerged, the fact of shared origins has been weaponised by the Russian political establishment to deny Ukrainian sovereignty. The assertion of a distinct Ukrainian identity historically threatened the success of the Russian imperial project, so instead there was a conscious effort to assimilate the Ukrainians into a ‘pan-Russian’ form of identity; “Identity concerns lead Russian authorities to reject the very existence of Ukrainians as a distinct group rather than an appendage of Russia and use violence in an attempt to destroy Ukrainian language, identity, and culture” (Finkel, 2024).

In spite of a continuous project to assimilate ethnic Ukrainians and minorities on what now comprises the Ukrainian territory into the Russian world since the early 18th century, many ethnic Ukrainians still retained distinct markers of belonging (Plokhy, 2015). Historian Paul Magosci has argued that the project of Russification on the Ukrainian territory did not lead to the desertion of native Ukrainian identity or ‘successful’ assimilation, but rather to the “acquisition of multiple identities”, as is not uncommon amongst subordinated ethnic groups (Magosci, 1989). There was a clear hierarchy to this attempted project of russification, with ethnic Russians paternalistically referred to as “great Russians,” or *velikorossiyane*, and ethnic Ukrainians referred to as “little Russians,” or *malorossiyane* (Kohut, 1986). When a national movement began to develop amongst Ukrainian intellectuals in the mid 19th century, the Russian establishment reacted by intensely repressing the usage of the Ukrainian language and distinct forms of cultural expression, especially from 1863-1905 (Kappeler, 2003 : 8). The intermarriage of Russian settlers and native Ukrainians, the repression of the Ukrainian language and cultural elements, and the development of Surzhyk, a Russian-Ukrainian linguistic hybrid, all served to deepen the blurring of identities.

Yet, in spite of this blurring of identities, there is a clear pattern of ethnic Russians continuing to be identified as ‘others’. Russians came to be continuously constructed as adversaries, or occupiers, or at worst - as enemies in the Ukrainian imagination, with clear negative “ethno-

⁸ *A medieval federation of East Slavic, Norse, and Finnic peoples centred around the city of Kyiv from the late 9th to the mid-13th century* (Plokhy, 2015).

stereotypes” widely observable in folk tradition (Kuzmenko, 2022). The folklorist Georgy Bulashev wrote in 1909;

“Ukrainians, by custom, call *velykorosy* (Russians) *moskals*, (or) *lapotniks*, and treat them with distrust, even with some apprehension, considering them greedy, brutal, insincere, cunning, lazy and vindictive. People avoid having any dealings with a moskal, let alone hiring him. A moskal...will invariably deceive, or one will have to fight with him because of his laziness and cunning, and then he will do something to one that one will regret for the rest of one’s life” (Bulashev via Kuzmenko, 2022 : 18)

During the Soviet period, markers of Ukrainian national identity continued to be repressed⁹ (Plokhyy, 2015), and the population went under an even more aggressive process of russification made possible by the centralisation of the education system. Deepening this state of hybridity, cues from Ukrainian culture were assimilated into the broader Soviet cultural sphere. A programme of forced migration and resettlement during the Soviet period, in which ethnic Russians came to demographically dominate the eastern and certain southern regions of the country also complicated matters (Ibid; Wilson, 2022).

The lines between occupier and occupied have been blurred by the aggressive russification of Ukrainians, and other ethnic groups colonized by both the Russian and Soviet imperial projects. Sectors of Ukrainian society have been consciously involved in the consolidation of Russian/Soviet power, both historically through to the ongoing contemporary conflict. Cossack elites contributed to the formation of the Russian empire (Plokhyy, 2014; Gerasimov & Mogilner, 2015 : 719). A range of ethnic Ukrainians have served in the apparatus of Soviet state repression¹⁰.

⁹ *Apart from a brief period from 1923-1931, in which Bolshevik authorities briefly encouraged the Korenizatsiia, or ‘indigenization’ of its territories, before a brutal turnaround, fearing the emergence of independence movements (Wilson, 2022).*

¹⁰ *Semyon Tsvigun for instance, who was born to a Ukrainian peasant family, rose through the ranks of the NKVD and KGB, to take a senior position in which he was instrumental in surveilling, intimidating and arresting Ukrainian nationalists and dissidents in “Operation Bloc” in the early 1970s (Bertelsen, 2022).*

National identity since independence

Ukrainians were often cited as having a nebulous, or fragmentary sense of national identity prior to 2014 (Wilson, 2022). There was not a consolidated sense of an ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’; of ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Kuzio, 2001). In the place of a coherent national identity there was instead a plurality of strong regional identities compounded by divergent political orientations and overlapping imperial legacies. This was sometimes simplistically described as a binary of western/central Ukraine, who were more oriented towards a European identity, against eastern/southern Ukraine, who were more oriented towards a (pan-Russian) identity. Local historian Yaroslav Hrytsak infamously argued that regional identities ran so deep that there were not two, but in fact twenty-two Ukraines (Hrytsak via Ishchenko, 2024). Regional affiliations with pan-Russian identity quickly waned after 2014; “the Euromaidan Revolution, Russian military aggression in 2014, increasing domination of Ukrainian identity policies and weakness of pro-Russian political parties led to the progressive marginalisation of pan-Russian identity in Ukraine” (Kuzio, 2024). Instead, a more assertive, oppositional national identity began to develop hegemony.

Against Russianness

Since independence from the Soviet Union, a Ukrainian nationalist movement in politics and the cultural sphere more broadly set out to define as essential ‘Russianness’ as inherently negative, and often seen as the direct inverse of essential Ukrainian qualities. Sociologist Volodymyr Ishchenko (a scholar whose work I find problematic in other regards) has nonetheless summarised the situation succinctly as follows;

“For over thirty years, the Ukrainian nationalist intelligentsia had been advancing a very specific project of Ukrainian modernity. Its two main components were a rejection of Soviet modernization and an anti-Russian articulation of Ukrainian national identity. These intellectuals sought to draw an equivalence between everything Ukrainian...and everything modern, while on the other hand they hoped to associate everything backward with everything Soviet and Russian. In effect, they sought to reverse the symbolic hierarchy that identified Ukrainian with backwardness, which they feared existed behind the screen of the Soviet internationalist project. Now ‘Ukrainian’ should be seen as young, metropolitan, cosmopolitan, fluent in English, stylish, mobile, liberal, well-educated, successful. The ‘Soviet’ and ‘Russian’, on the other hand, had to become old, conservative, provincial, rigid, clinging to dying industries, poorly or inadequately educated, in bad taste, losers” (Ishchenko, 2024).

This programme has become considerably more aggressive since 2014, moving from a ‘de-communization’ process in the early years of independence in which communist symbols are removed from the urban landscape (Kasianov, 2023), to a more formalised programme of ‘de-Russification’, in which Russian toponymic and linguistic elements are systematically expunged from public usage, and replaced with their Ukrainian equivalents. Restrictions were placed on Russian artists touring Ukraine, limits were placed on the import of Russian literature, and restrictions were placed on the distribution of Russian film and television (Zhurzhenko, 2021). It should be noted that this agenda had limited success, with many continuing to speak in Russian and to engage heavily with Russian popular culture (Ibid).

Perceptions of Russian civilians in years preceding the 2022 full-scale invasion

Furthermore, even after the disintegration of Russian-Ukrainian relations at the state level after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and Russia’s support of separatists in Donbas, many Ukrainians still had favourable opinions of the Russian public according to research conducted by Olga Onuch. In her study 41% of Ukrainians polled cited that they had a “very favourable” opinion of “everyday Russians”, and 43% having a “mostly favourable” opinion (Onuch, 2015 : 38).

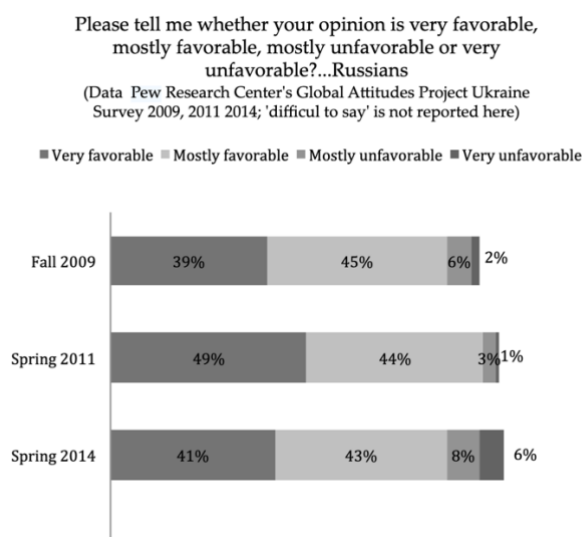


Fig. 2: How Ukrainians view Russians, 2009 – 2014. (Source: Onuch, 2015 : 39)

In this study, participants described their Russian counterparts as mostly a “reasonable” people. In focus groups conducted in 2014; “Ukrainian participants frequently explained the difference between the size and scope of protest participation in Ukraine

and Russia as a product of the different information Ukrainians and Russians are exposed to, which, according to them, helps to shape different political cultures. They often say ‘it’s not their fault, they are normal [*zvychaini*] people just like us.’ This anecdotal evidence can be used to underscore the fact that any difference that ‘ordinary’ Ukrainians see with ‘ordinary’ Russians is not hostile.” (Ibid : 39). Onuch stresses that it was “a reasonable hypothesis that ‘ordinary’ citizens distinguish between the country, the state, the politicians, and the people they lead”, (Ibid : 40) as was evidenced by the data gathered on the participants perceptions of the state of Russia, shown below.

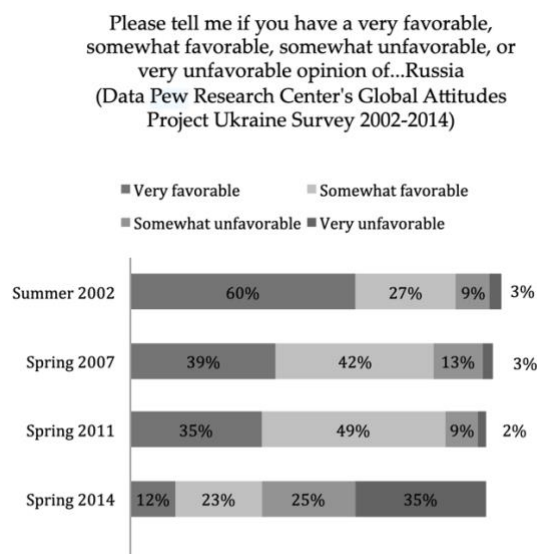


Fig. 3: How Ukrainians view Russia, 2009 – 2014. (Source: Onuch, 2015 : 40)

Epistemological ruptures and the problem of totalitarianism

For the majority of Ukrainians, to reflect on the nature of Russian support for the war requires overcoming an epistemological rupture. Since the 2022 full-scale invasion, most severed personal and familial ties with Russian acquaintances, while the dynamics of the wartime Ukrainian media environment often obscure the complexities of dissent or ambivalence within the Russian population, as is common in wartime informational environments (Roeder, 2023; Popp & Mendelson, 2010). As a result, many Ukrainians are left with few reliable channels through which to assess the nature of Russian support for the war. Jokes made by Russians on Telegram cheering on the 2024 Okhmatdyt Children’s Hospital airstrike - “Not enough pigs died!” – are not seen as the expressions of extremists within Russian society, but as a reflection of a genocidal mindset shared by the population at large (Vinok Collective, 2024).

While over 18,900 arrests were recorded during anti-war protests across 50+ Russian cities in 2022 (OVD-info, 2025), overt dissent has since been driven underground by increasingly draconian measures. Since then, increasingly draconian legal measures have been put in place regarding anti-war protest, and since then anti-war sentiment has generally been expressed through clandestine channels. Nonetheless, the absence of visible resistance, including from the Russian diaspora (Bygnes, 2025), has presumably fed into Ukrainian perceptions of the totality of Russian society as complicit. Surveys do little to alleviate this uncertainty. A poll from the Russian Public Opinion Research Center in early March 2022 reported that 71% of Russians supported the “special military operation” (Alyukov, 2022), and support remained at 67% in February 2025 according to a poll by the same organization (ISW, 2025). Yet the credibility of such polls is compromised by the totalitarian context in which they are conducted (Alyukov, 2022).

Scholars have observed that the psychology of wartime support in Russia is not by any means clear-cut. As Jade McGlynn (2023) notes, “the boundary between support and opposition is not as clear as it might seem in our imaginations, nor is there always a clean moral divide on closer inspection.” Russian sociologist Boris Kagarlitsky observed, “Russian people are neither for the war nor against it. They do not react to the war” (McGlynn, 2023).

Ukrainians, however, who bear the brunt of this war, may not have the emotional remove from this conflict to reflect on these shades of grey, and are immersed in a local media environment which tends to paint the totality of Russian society as complicit. Here are opportune conditions for the formation and projection of an ‘enemy image’ onto the Russian civilian sphere, a concept I will elaborate on in my conceptual framework.

Gaps in the literature

The subjectivity of the Ukrainian public has been an often-neglected component in understanding the conflict, both by global leaders and by the academic community (Gerasimov & Mogliner, 2015; Biederava, 2024). Although there is a significantly larger body of work regarding Russian perceptions of the Ukrainian public (Riabchuk, 2016; Marples, 2017; Plokhyy, 2017; Kuzio, 2019; McGlynn, 2023), there is a surprising dearth of literature regarding the inverse. Those that have already investigated these perceptions have

generally done so before the full-scale invasion, and hence have attained what I imagine to be significantly different results to those I am expecting to receive based on my time in the field so far. I would divide the pre-2022 literature into that before the 2014 annexation of Crimea (Barrington, 2002; Kappeler, 2003), and that after the 2014 annexation but before the full-scale invasion (Onuch, 2015; Kermach, 2017). One local scholar conducted a similar study to mine (Skorokhod, 2023), analysing the construction of enmity, but in spite of an ostensible richness in data collection, was not able to provide much valuable qualitative detail in their results, and seemed to insufficiently delimit the civilian sphere from the military/political spheres.

Conceptual framework

My research builds on the tradition of social identity theory, and more broadly on the field of socio-psychological conflict studies. I draw in particular on the thought of close collaborators Daniel Rothbart and Karina V. Korostelina, and of Daniel Bar-Tal.

There has been an increasing amount of work around the consolidation of Ukrainian national identity around an inherent anti-Russianness (Ishchenko, 2024; Kulyk, 2018), and there has been some work on the development of the enemy image in relation to the Russian armed forces (Krouglov, 2025;) but there has been a dearth of research on the nature of enemy images in relation to the Russian civilian population.

Defining core concepts : enmity and enmification

Social identity theory, originally conceptualised by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the late 1970's, maintains that the formation of social identities often gravitates towards the construction of an imagined 'in-group' and 'out-group', or 'other' through "opposing images of self and other" (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2009 : 89). This phenomenon is generally referred to as "othering". In conflict contexts processes of 'othering' generally gravitate towards a more extreme form;

"the other is depicted as an outsider and different but not necessarily as a threat. Othering is a very common phenomenon, perhaps even unavoidable, and occurs in group formation processes where there is a need to define 'them' to define 'us'...an enemy image is a construct of 'them', but a very potent version, since 'they', being external to 'us', also constitutes a threat. The elements of collective identity are easy to manipulate in the construction of fear directed towards the significant

collective other” (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2024)

Here, the other becomes the ‘enemy’, and the socio-psychological process through which the enemy is constructed can be referred to as “enmification.”¹¹ The result of enmification is “enmity.” While Bar-Tal, Rothbart and Korostelina employ the word enmity, they do not provide a clear definition, as it is only one component of broader socio-psychological phenomena that their work investigates. Connected literature can provide us with a workable definition; “Enmity describes a relationship. Its ascription depends on the presence, real or imagined, of a threat that incites fear and loathing of the opponent and, almost as often, fosters unity and a sense of purpose among peers” (Becke, 2023)

Rothbart and Korostelina apply social identity theory to analyze the forms of enmity that develop in contexts of protracted armed conflict. They identify how the civilian ‘other’ comes to be constructed as the ‘enemy’, with the collapse of moral distinctions between the political/military sphere and the everyday civilian sphere;

“In many cases of protracted conflict, the entire enemy population is thought to act in lock-step. They are perceived as a totality that follows the same mission and speaks with one voice... the boundary between the dangerous Other and the innocent¹² Other is highly permeable, and the perception of both groups almost lacks any moral or political differentiation” (Rothbart and Korostelina, 2009 : 88).

Robert Rieber and Robert Kelly have drawn a distinction between individual, subjective enmity, and “collective enmity”; “Enmity is a visceral, powerfully felt phenomenon which only can be truly meaningful on an individual level. Collective enmity entails marshalling this phenomenon and redirecting it at targets often far removed from the individual’s own experience.” (Rieber & Kelly, 1991 : 6 - 7)

Daniel Bar-Tal describes enmity as a core part of a “sociopsychological infrastructure” that develops in protracted conflict scenarios, which includes “collective memory, ethos of

¹¹ Sometimes referred to in the literature as ‘enemization’.

¹² While this framework offers a very useful analytical lens, I find Rothbart and Korostelina’s binary between perceived ‘innocence’ and ‘guilt’/complicity somewhat simplistic, especially when it comes to the way one society perceives the moral terrain of totalitarian societies. As Russia specialist Jade McGlynn argues; “This indivisibility complicates a tendency in Western thinking to see people living in autocracies as heroes or villains, a binary that overlooks the corrosive nature of fear and how it encourages people to justify their actions” (McGlynn 2023).

conflict, and collective emotional orientations. This infrastructure fulfils important individual and collective level functions, including the important role of formation, maintenance, and strengthening of a social identity that reflects this conflict” (Bar-Tal, 2009 : 1430). Here I am most interested in the collective emotional orientation. This sociopsychological infrastructure is seen as an cognitive feature developed to improve resilience, and hence the state generally attempts to institutionalize it;

“Special attempts are made to disseminate this infrastructure via societal channels of communication and institutionalize it. The evolved sociopsychological infrastructure becomes a prism through which society members construe their reality, collect new information, interpret their experiences, and make decisions about their course of action. This infrastructure becomes hegemonic, rigid, and resistant to change as long as the intractable conflict continues” (Ibid : 1430). This serves to amplify confirming information and filter out “incongruent” information; “in harsh conflicts socio-psychological barriers that tend to “close minds” and facilitate tunnel vision evolve, precluding the contemplation of incongruent information” (Bar-Tal, 2013 : 315).

Defining enemy images

An essential component of enmification is the construction of ‘enemy images’, which we can define as; “the mental representation or stereotype that individuals, groups, or even entire societies construct about a perceived adversary. These images are typically laden with negative traits, depicting the enemy as inherently hostile, morally inferior, and a direct threat to the well-being or survival of the in-group” (Osimen et al, 2023 : 5).

Furthermore, “the enemy image usually portrays the enemy as either deindividuated (deprived of individuality and turned into an anonymous figure in a group) or dehumanized (turned into something evil and/or subhuman)” (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2024 : 3). Enemy images serve to create a narrative of existential rivalry; “In their most simple function, they establish powerful imaginings of existential antagonisms, an unbridgeable divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ fuelled by fear.” (Steiner & Önnersfors, 2024 : 1).

“Several psychological factors contribute to the formation and maintenance of enemy images. Cognitive simplification is one of the key elements. In times of tension, ambiguity, or threat, people tend to simplify their environment to reduce uncertainty. This simplification often involves stereotyping, where the adversary is reduced to a set of negative, easily identifiable

traits...Once established, enemy images are often maintained through confirmation bias, where individuals seek out information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs while dismissing or ignoring contradictory evidence. This process solidifies the negative perception of the adversary, making it more resistant to change.” (Osimen et al, 2023 : 5)

Yet, naturally, enemy images do change with time. It is noted that enemy images are fluid; “neither ‘enemies’ nor ‘images’ are stable categories. They are not set once and for all but are subject to complex processes of construction in diverging contexts over time” (Ibid : 2). Relentless news cycles and social media has intensified the construction of enemy images in contemporary conflicts (Osimen et al, 2023).

Enmity and consolidation of national identity

The process of enmification additionally serves to consolidate national identity; “Inventing an enemy begins, paradoxically, with the invention of the self” (Vourinen, 2012 : 1). In the context of Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, social identity theory offers a useful explanatory framework for how Ukrainian national identity has become increasingly mobilized and consolidated around anti-Russian sentiment, a sentiment that extends in political rhetoric to beyond the Russian armed forces and political establishment, to encompass the totality of Russian society, and “Russianness” itself (Ishchenko, 2024). This is evident in political rhetoric, as explained earlier, but crucially, there is a lack of research on how deeply entrenched this sentiment is in the subjectivity of Ukrainian civilians.

It is common for an interdependence to develop between the national identities of the two societies in question, with a society developing its ‘national self image’ against the image of its enemy. As summarised by Umberto Eco, “Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth” (Eco, 2012 : 3).

Herbert C. Kelman has observed that in protracted, existential conflicts, it is common for a “negative interdependence” between the national identity of the two societies in question to form, which he highlights in the Israeli-Palestinian case. Here, “asserting one group’s identity requires negating the identity of the other.” (Kelman, 1999). In this instance, each group “perceives the very existence of the other—the other’s status as a nation—to be a

threat to its own existence and status as a nation. Each holds the view that only one can be a nation: Either we are a nation or they are” (Kelman, 1987 : 354).

Kelman speaks to the territorial dynamics often at play within this totalizing form of enmity, which he extends beyond the Israeli-Palestinian context to the Serbo-Bosnian context, and the Hutu-Tutsi context in Rwanda, amongst others;

“This zero-sum view flows directly from the fact that the two national movements focus on the same land, which both claim as their national homeland...each side has been convinced that the ultimate intention of the other is to destroy it — indeed, that its own destruction is inherent in the other’s ideology.” (Kelman, 1999).

Rival groups with strong cultural similarities and historical hybridity between identities often develop a specific form of enmity, as identified by Taras Kuzio, citing Anna Triandafyllidou’s research on this phenomenon in the Balkan region;

“in the Ukrainian-Russian case, when rival nations contest territory, history and cultural heritage ‘by asserting that specific myths, symbols and/or ancestry are part of their national past’. This is a direct threat to the viability of the former dependency (i.e. Ukraine) because ‘They thus threaten the ingroup’s sense of uniqueness and authenticity. The ingroup may therefore be led to redefine its identity in order to assert that the contested symbols or myths are its own cultural property” (Kuzio, 2001 : 346)

Total enmity

I will refer to this most extreme form of enmity as “total enmity” (or “totalizing enmity” in the instance that a respondent’s impulse is towards making absolute statements, but they still allow for some small degree of differentiation). The term (also sometimes translated as “absolute enmity”) was first developed by Karl Schmitt (1927), who remains very controversial due to his association with the Nazi regime. Nonetheless, he articulated concepts which have gone on to be revived and modified by the theorists who came after him (including Hannah Arendt) to understand how modernity, totalitarianism, and modern warfare have transformed social processes of enmification. This shift moves beyond contained forms of enmity (“statist enmity”, or “hedged enmity”), in which the enmity is focussed at state structures, or a rival army, to a radicalized form where effectively the entire rival society becomes homogenized into a collective enemy.

Hannah Arendt has argued that;

“with the end of the nation state, we also witness the decline of the real enmity based on the perception of real provocations and concrete guilt and the manifestation of forms of enmity that dissolve any relation between action and hate, guilt and enmity, obedience and protection. The enemy is no longer he or she that threatens one’s existence, but anybody” (Thorup, 2015).

Approaching an analysis of enmity

In these conflict circumstances, Rothbart and Korostelina speak to the formation of a “collective axiology” and “collective generality” in the in-group. Collective axiology refers to the shared moral framework through which the in-group perceives the actions and character of the out-group;

“Groups with a high degree of axiological balance recognize their own moral failings. In contrast, groups with a low degree of axiological balance correspondingly possess a monolithic depiction of both ingroup and outgroup identities. This tends to foster a “tunnel consciousness” that diminishes capacity for independent thought.” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2009 : 88)

Collective generality, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which in-group members essentialize, or differentiate, the character of the out-group;

“The collective axiology is also defined by collective generality, referring to the ways in which ingroup members categorize the Other, how they simplify, or do not simplify, their essential character. A high level of collective generality is evident in notions of the outgroup as homogeneous, exhibiting unchanging behaviors, committed to long-term fixed beliefs and values” (Ibid : 89)

In order to approach an analysis of the trends in enmity of a society towards its rival civilian outgroup, Rothbart and Korostelina have identified the following as core axes of analysis:

- (1) the perceived homogeneity of perceptions of the other/enemy*
- (2) the scope of enemy categorization (who is categorized as the ‘enemy’)*
- (3) the “resistance to change in their ideas about the other”* (Ibid : 89)

They state that “the protracted conflict usually rests on a collective axiology with low axiological balance and high collective generality. After generations of degrading stories, the ingroup becomes incapable of understanding and perceiving the Other” (Korostelina, 2009).

Methodology / Research Design

Data collection

As noted by Rieber (1991), “Enmity is a visceral, powerfully felt phenomenon which only can be truly meaningful on an individual level. Collective enmity entails marshalling this phenomenon and redirecting it at targets often far removed from the individual’s own experience”. To understand the patterns of collective enmity, we must first gain data on individual enmity. An understanding of individual forms of enmity is perhaps best assessed through long-form interviews, from which can draw insights from the subjectivity of respondents. My data was collected through eight semi-structured interviews. I already had some level of personal connection with all of the interviewees, save one, who was the husband of a pre-existing contact. The interviews ranged from 60 – 170 minutes. Some were conducted entirely in English, others were conducted in Ukrainian, Russian (or Surzhyk), with the assistance of a translator. My partner, Romana, who is fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian, acted as translator. The fact that she might hold her own opinions about the subject matter should not affect the reliability of my data, should there have been any semantic micro-shifts in the content of her translation. Quotes provided in the discussion of results have been directly translated from the original language, which should mitigate this problem from possibly arising. It should be noted that very occasionally, Romana would ask clarifying questions without my direct input when the respondent did not understand, or was struggling to respond to the question.

I found that Ukrainians were made slightly uncomfortable by formality in relation to the interview, especially due to the length of the interviews, so I generally allowed for friends or partners to be present for the interview. Every now and again, the additional people present expressed their opinions, occasionally making periods of the interview become a kind of informal focus group

I feel that this level of pre-existing connection was important for the participants to feel comfortable to speak freely on the subject matter, which is understandably a very sensitive subject in Ukraine.

The analysis of the interview data is thematic in nature, identifying patterns I find in the

responses. I went through a two stage process of coding my interview transcripts, first an inductive round, then identifying and structuring the data around a deductive series of codes.

As I had the privilege of being in the field for a very long time while formulating my research topic and gathering data (some eight months in total), I also have introduced an element of ethnography to my data collection, having taken substantial field notes over my time here. These field notes will be occasionally used as a form of data where they are useful to point to wider patterns observed that the scope my eight interview respondents may be insufficient to provide.

Interview design

I have attached my list of research questions in my appendix, but it should be noted that I often deviated from this structure, as certain questions and themes were addressed by my respondents before I had reached them as per my original structure. I prompted respondents to speak to how their perceptions of Russians have changed over time, guiding them to consider three periods, i) before the 2014 annexation of Crimea and outbreak of conflict in Ukraine's Eastern territories, ii) after this period, but before the 2022 full-scale invasion, and iii) after the full-scale invasion. Then, I asked the respondents to consider what they saw as the characteristics which might define a Russian civilian as opposed to a Ukrainian civilian, and to consider what perceptions Russians may hold of Ukrainians. Here, I tried to gain a sense of how deeply and through what means the in-group and out-group are defined. If it was not made clear, I inquired into when the respondent developed a coherent sense of national identity. Next, I inquired about whether the respondents believed that Russian civilians have come to hold an imperialistic mindset, and if so, whether they felt this could be changed. Then I asked the interviewees to map estimated percentages as on a 'spectrum of enmity' which represented the entire Russian civilian population, ranging from civilians who are actively opposed to Ukraine (the most active supporters of the war), to those who are active allies of Ukraine. The full spectrum is listed below:

active opponent - passive opponent - neutral - passive ally - active ally

The scale of this study is not large enough to glean meaningful results from the percentages themselves, and this is not, after all, a quantitative study. Rather, encouraging the participants to demarcate the Russian civilian population into these categories opened the possibility to

discuss the phenomenon of gradations of support for both the war and Putin's regime, as well as to discuss neutrality in relation to the war effort. Otherwise, I believe the interviewees would be inclined to speak in binary terms. Demarcating these categories allowed the interviewee to speak to each individually, and I asked what sectors of society were most likely to fall into each of these categories. The use of a spectrum, I believe, makes respondents more likely to consider the possibility of change in the Russian civilian population; a passive opponent losing faith in state propaganda and becoming neutral is far easier to understand than simply an 'opponent' or 'enemy' becoming one who does not support the war effort.

Next, I inquired as to the reasons believed that Russian civilians supported the invasion of Ukraine, and to expand on how they believed the population to engage with state propaganda. I followed by eliciting responses about structural dynamics within Russia, asking regarding perceived differences in opinion between the urban and rural population (although this issue was often raised organically). I also inquired about how Russia's ethnic minorities might relate to the war; whether they generally shared opinions about the war with their ethnic Russian peers. The next series of questions were primarily to do with resistance and the possibility of future change or revolutionary action in Russia; if the respondent could imagine a 'Maidan' or revolutionary action taking place in Russia, and if so, what would be likely to prompt it. I prompted the respondents to consider the Russian diaspora, and whether they perceived the diaspora to be similarly supportive of the invasion of Ukraine. If fear of punishment, or manipulation through propaganda came up as the main reason for lack of action, then interviewees were given the chance to speak to a section of the Russian civilian population for who this is not a factor.

To close the interview, I returned to the spectrum of enmity to inquire as to which sections of the Russian civilian population were considered to be personal enemies of the respondent. My final question was regarding whether a future could be imagined in which Russia is not a threat to Ukraine.

Sample set

The majority of respondents were from Kyiv Oblast, with half from Kyiv city itself, of who the majority were from the city's Left Bank, known as a generally working class area. I

attempted to ensure a certain degree of regional variation, with one respondent from Western Ukraine, and another from Luhansk city. While five respondents primarily grew up in an urban context, three were raised in small Ukrainophone villages. All were, however, residents of Kyiv, with the exception of one, who had been raised in Kyiv, but had emigrated, and divided her time between Stuttgart and Kyiv. The majority of the respondents were from working class backgrounds. There could have been more diversity in terms of socio-economic background. I already had some form of personal connection with the majority of the interviewees. The following names used are pseudonyms.

Interviewee (Pseudonyms)	Regional background	Linguistic background*	Age	Occupation
Interviewee 1 - Valentina	Kyiv city, left bank.	Russian/Surzhyk	Late 40s	IT professional
Interviewee 2 - Stepan	Kyiv oblast	Ukrainian	Early 20s	Undergraduate student / freelance masseuse
Interviewee 3 - Artem	Kyiv oblast, Kalabust	Ukrainian	Late 20s	IT professional
Interviewee 4 – Borys	Luhansk Oblast	Russian	Early 50s	Construction work for Armed Forces
Interviewee 5 – Bohdan	Kyiv city, left bank	Russian	Early 30s	Sales, freelance designer, formerly a fashion designer
Interviewee 6 - Vladyslav	Kyiv city, left bank	Russian	Mid 30s	Marketing / masters student
Interviewee 7 - Olga	Western Ukraine	Ukrainian	Late 40s	Housekeeper
Interviewee 8 – Andrii	Kyiv city, right bank	Russian	Late 50s	Real estate

Positionality

I feel that not being a Ukrainian national as researcher was possibly an advantage regarding the respondents feeling comfortable engaging in certain elements of the discussion. Two respondents acknowledged that their views may be “controversial”, as it seemed there was a transgressive element to straying too far from the political rhetoric which was invoked in the informational space regarding how one “should” consider Russian nationals.

Sometimes, I experienced a slight awkwardness asking certain questions, especially regarding what differences were perceived between Ukrainians and Russians, as the question could be interpreted as me denying these differences, which is, naturally, a point of extreme political

tension. I had to be careful to not give the sense that I was playing devil's advocate.

Living in Ukraine for an extended period, I had to attempt to emotionally remove myself from the conflict to a certain extent so as to not develop my own forms of enmity around Russian civilians. Researchers who have focussed on enmity have stressed the importance of attempting to not overtly “take sides” in the conflict (cite), a feat which seemed very difficult considering the significantly clear sense as to who the aggressor state in this conflict was, unlike many other field contexts in which enmity studies have taken place.

Findings and analysis

Here, I provide my findings regarding how Ukrainians define who constitutes ‘the enemy’ within the everyday Russian civilian sphere, and the nature of the enemy images constructed. First I have provided observations on the changing relationship with Russians, and on the changing nature of Ukrainian national identity to give a necessary context of continuity to the findings. Drawing on the work of Rothbart & Korestelina (2009 : 89), my findings are focussed around (1) the homogeneity of perceptions of the other/enemy, (2) the scope of enemy categorization, and to a lesser extent, (3) the resistance to re-evaluation of enemy status/“change in their ideas about the other”.

I was struck by the heterogeneity of opinions from my eight respondents. It was clear that highly individualized forms of “personal enmity” were held, even within this small sample. While some held more totalized forms of enmity, others expressed more ambivalent views, problematizing essentialist categorizations. This frustrated the formation of a coherent enemy image.

A core tension was observable between a minority of respondents who either insinuated or explicitly spoke to an inherent similarity between Ukrainians and Russians (the product of their deeply entangled histories, especially during the Soviet period), and those who asserted an absolutely fundamental cultural differences in values, worldview, and cultural protocol, with some going as far as to stress an essential ‘civilizational’ difference.

Another inherent tension was in the way that the civilian-state relations was conceptualized,

sometimes in contradictory ways. Russian civilians were alternately cast as ‘citizens’, who had consented to their political circumstances, and possessed the agency to catalyse political change, or they were described as ‘subjects’ of a totalitarian system, with essentially no means to change their political circumstances.

From past affinities to social rupture: changes in perceptions of Russian civilians and changes in national identity (until 2022)

It is first worth noting the dynamic of changes in perceptions of Russians, to provide context to the views expressed now in comparative perspective. Prior to 2022 essentially all respondents maintained generally positive opinions of everyday Russian civilians, even after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. These findings closely corroborated with those of Olga Onuch (2015), cited earlier in this piece. I will elaborate on anecdotes the respondents shared of personal experiences with Russians which made them uneasy, even before 2014; specifically regarding their attitudes towards Ukrainian sovereignty and Ukrainians more broadly. A recurring theme was that about half the respondents did not have a particularly strong or coherent sense of national identity until 2014, or even as late as 2022.

Many expressed that they did not have a particularly strong sense of national consciousness until after 2014, or even as late as 2022, with the exception of Olga, Vladyslav, and Andrii. Olga had grown up in Western Ukraine, the heartland of Ukrainian nationalism, and had taken part in demonstrations for Ukrainian independence in the final years of the Soviet Union. Vladyslav cited the fact he had been a proud supporter of Victor Yushchenko’s “*Nasha Ukraina*” party in the mid 2000’s, the first party to attempt to begin to sever the country’s ties with Russia, and to start a process of Ukrainization in language and cultural policies. When describing having his sense of national identity that he had since childhood, he stressed “I know who I am...I know the difference between Ukrainian and Russian”. Andrii noted that he felt a distinct sense of Ukrainian identity was “percolating” prior to 2014, but remained more “subconscious” for many.

The remainder of respondents had a far more nebulous sense of national identity until 2014, or even as late as 2022. One respondent, Bohdan, admitted that in his teenage years, he had more of a white nationalist ideology, in which his markers of belonging lay more in a pan-European “white” world; “at some point in my childhood I... had some nationalistic views on life and politics of other people. So at some point in time, I may have felt some kind of a

sense of being a Ukrainian, of being this or that. But for me, it was more, well...something closer to a white person, to a 'European', than some kind of differentiation between Ukrainians and Russians”.

An alternative form of enmity was even described by one respondent from Eastern Ukraine, pointing to the intense regional identities that existed within Ukraine at this point. Borys, who grew up in Luhansk, explained that he grew up for much of his life, through the Soviet Union until the early 2000's, as feeling like “part of the *Ruskiy mir*” (Russian world), until moving to Moscow, where he and his wife were treated as second class citizens due to their Ukrainian background. He explained if there was anyone that he and his wife were afraid of, it was western Ukrainians, not Russians. He had been taught in school and by his family that Western Ukraine was full of Banderites, who would “kill us in the street if they heard us speaking Russian”. Borys and his wife visited western Ukraine for the first time as late as 2008, and they were so anxious about doing so that they left their son at home in fear of his safety. It wasn't until arriving in Lviv that they realized that their fears were unfounded.

A sense of fraternity was cited by some, with Vladyslav describing a design collaboration, named “*Unity*” with Russian artists, that he acknowledges he now feels naïve for indulging; “We created this concept about unity, about brotherhood, about brothers, nations, and everything, because this information were inside of all of us. So this time, I thought we is similar, you know, with people who are in Moscow, who are into culture. We (had) a lot of friends from Russia”. Valentina, who now expressed some of the most extremely negative opinions of Russians, acknowledged that (having grown up in the Soviet Union) she used to admire Russians and Russian culture more broadly, citing the paternalistic relationship that Ukrainians used to have with Russians; believing “that they were important in world history and literature...(I thought) they could enrich our society”.

Andrii relayed a story where he was socialising in a dacha in the mid 2000's with a group of Moscow's queer community after a performance he was involved with in Moscow, who he assumed to be 'allies'. He mentioned that although they didn't ever usually talk politics, the topic came up this one occasion, and he was shocked to discover when he railed against Vladimir Putin that his gay Russian friends were all strikingly in support of the man. Furthermore, “the stranger thing for me was that there was a philological question”; when he referred to events “*v ukraini*”, his Russian interlocutors would repeatedly correct him; “*na*

ukraini". The former translates to "in Ukraine", whereas the latter could be translated as "*on the Ukraine*", denoting a territory within Russia. The conversation nearly came to blows.

Several respondents expressed that they had had limited or no contact with Russian nationals for the majority of their life. Bohdan asserted that unlike the present day, there was insufficient information online to know what Russians were thinking in the period between 2014 – 2022, meaning it was difficult to harbour negative feelings; "People didn't know whether they supported the war or not. They didn't really understand." In passing conversations in the field, I heard people regularly mention that they simply did not discuss politics with Russians after 2014, and that those who actively supported the annexation of Crimea and the separatists in Donbas were on the social margins. All respondents were unanimous in stating that they could not have imagined that the majority of the Russian public would support a full-scale invasion of Ukraine prior to 2022. It came as a shock for essentially all when seemingly open-minded, or "normal" Russians expressed support for the full-scale invasion.

There was a clear pattern of respondents having immediately cut off correspondence with Russians after the full-scale invasion, regardless of their political opinions. Andrii was called by five friends in Russia, on separate occasions, who apologized for the invasion. He immediately broke off contact with all of them. In one occasion the contact was recalled as having been broken on the Russian side. Vladyslav relayed the story of a friend of his aunt's, who he used to see on trips to Crimea (both before and after occupation) when he went to visit family, who insisted that the images of the corpses of Ukrainian civilians in the early days of the war was disinformation;

"Every day I sent her some photos, information because they haven't this news and everything. And once I sent her the photos of the (dead) children, she wrote me, 'oh - this is was, like, fake, you know, it's just like movie'...She challenged me. I sent her – (I kept) sending, sending. The last word was don't never send this to me again, and never write (to) me again."

Vladyslav pointed out that he did have one friend in Russia who he maintained contact with, who sends money to the Ukrainian armed forces. He specified that she was a Belarussian national, and that whenever she writes to him through social media she writes in Ukrainian language. This was the only instance I heard of a respondent maintaining contact with anyone inside the Russian Federation since the full-scale invasion.

From totalizing enmity to cautious differentiation : Perceptions from 2022 onwards

I saw trends of “totalizing enmity”, where respondents referred to the Russian civilian population as a whole, especially earlier in my interviews, but as our conversations continued, many began to expand on more nuanced forms of moral gradation, distinguishing between different degrees of complicity. Statements expressing totalizing enmity towards the Russian civilian population coalesced around a sense that they were guilty through either active ideological alignment with the invasion of Ukraine, or guilty simply through their inaction. Occasionally, explicitly dehumanizing language was used, or expressions of existential incompatibility were made – that Russians, as a whole, did not have a right to exist.

Valentina made a point of referring to Russian nationals not as Russians, but as “*Katsapa*”¹³, a slur which can translate as “goats”. There was disagreement as to the etymology and personal significance of the word in our conversation, at which there were several people present. Vladyslav specificized; “When Kyiv was born, there (Moscow) was just a field, you know, and there's jumping some goats, so that's why we call the Russians goats. Because they're fucking field goats for me”. Valentina stated “It's a name for a people who don't have the right to exist”. Olga, under her breath, at the end of the interview, simply said; “these are not people”.

Vladyslav described a fantasy of the annihilation of all Russians, a fantasy I have heard described by others in Kyiv.

“I want this, to burn this shit...you know, to burn all these character(s) and kill everybody.” But he immediately after added the caveat; “But if you think clearly, you know, to kill everybody is not the way to make a situation, you know, like, to change a situation”. In spite of hearing emotionally charged fantasies of annihilation in which Russians are depicted as a collective enemy made in passing in the field, or seeing social media posts featuring slogans such as “Nuke Moscow”, of note was the fact that when I asked respondents to break down

¹³ The term was used as a distinction of Russians since the 18th century in the Ukrainian language. There are two explanations for the etymology. If from the Slavic root “koza”, for goat, it is thought to due to many Russians in the Ukrainian territory being part of the “Old Believers” Orthodox denomination, who wore extremely long beards, apparently mimicking the beard of a goat. If from the Turkic root “kassap” (originally from the Arabic), it can translate as “butchers”.

what the expression “death to enemies” meant to them, all unanimously stated, that the expression applies only to the “occupiers”, to the Russian Armed Forces. That is to say, it is grounded in the moral logic of self-defense. As said by Bohdan; “I believe that this saying means that...like, in the bible, if you will come with me with a sword, you're gonna be fallen by the sword. That's what it means.” Stepan corroborated with this; “*smert' voroham*, it means, like, death for all people who want (to) kill us. If you are going on our land, you will be killed. If you just don't like us, don't go for us. We will not kill you. But if you want to kill us, we will kill you.”

Enmity was, for some participants, only constructed around active culpability through direct ideological support for the invasion of Ukraine, the ‘active supporters’ of the invasion. Bohdan, for instance, stressed that those who were not fervent supporters were likely to be more malleable in their perspective, and hence could be convinced to change their outlook as a reason for his stance;

“My personal enemy is, first, it's war supporters. Definitely, they are my (enemies) - active supporters. Definitely. And also, I do believe that even passive supporters could be changed to some neutrality, firstly, then to the next stage. Like, this always happens. If you do not have any opinion, you could be placed in anyone, right?...So my only enemy from all of this spectrum is going to be the active supporters of the war”.

Stepan took the same stance; “my enemies (are) active enemies. I think passive enemies like can still live life...but they should apologize for their mistaken opinion. Although I cannot imagine if this will ever be possible”.

For others, even the passive complicity of silence, apathy or the absence of resistance was sufficient to categorize one as an enemy. For many, neutrality was its own form of complicity, with several respondents resisting the distinction between ‘passive opponents’ and ‘neutral’ civilians that I had provided on the spectrum of enmity. Many respondents thought that a significant portion of the Russian civilian population were neutral in relation to the invasion, in particular the older respondents, who had grown up in the Soviet Union. Valentina suggested that she believed that 75% were neutral, while Borys suggested that 50% were neutral.

Many described the large proportion of civilians having a neutral stance being related to a

profound apathy, and a deep sense of evasion of personal responsibility in Russian culture. For others, a more extreme moral stance was taken, in which they stressed that all Russian civilians, with the exception of the *active* allies of Ukraine were considered their enemies. Only active support for Ukraine, in the form of public stances against the invasion, the provision of financial aid to the Ukrainian armed forces, the covert sharing of sensitive information about Russian troop movements, the sabotage of military infrastructure and conscription offices could redeem the Russian civilian from being considered an enemy. As stated by Artem; “I would say they're all enemies (all but active allies) because they're living in Russia and helping the Russian government pay taxes and do nothing to stop this war. And they are potential enemies on the battlefield, a lot of them. So I think they're enemies, too.” (Artem).

A reoccurring trope was that in ‘refusing’ to leave the Russian Federation, essentially civilians were complicit in supporting the invasion of Ukraine by providing tax revenue to the government, a huge quantity of which is funnelled into the military sector. Only one participant (whose brother, a Ukrainian national, was working in Moscow at the start of the full-scale invasion), drew attention to the complicated logistics of emigrating from the Russian Federation.

It should be noted that some of the respondents who maintained this more totalizing moral stance, went on to state that there was extremely limited options for active resistance that could be realistically taken. Artem struggled to think of meaningful forms of resistance inside Russia that could be taken on an individual level; “Yeah, I heard that they, some of them trying to burn this post, TIJK (conscription) post, as we said, for bringing people to the army...Maybe this one? What else they can do, actually? I don't know, man, I don't know.”

Valentina had asserted that Russia “functions not as a country, but as a system where every person has no rights, no will, no freedoms, but only duties”. When she was asked if she saw Russian civilians as willing participants in the Russian totalitarian system, she responded; “their opinion isn't really taken into consideration because there is no way out beyond being part of the system. If you know that you could possibly be sent to jail for 15 years for an (anti-war) Instagram post, what are you going to do with your life?”

Others who expressed more totalizing perspectives, such as Vladyslav, pointed out that he

truly believed that there was a way for Russian civilians to catalyse change through large scale collective action; “You can do like silent protest. It's like, this person, okay, she's doing at least something, you know. If thousands of people will be silent protest - it will be very loud protest.” However, he suggested that such collective action was unlikely as there was insufficient numbers of active allies of Ukraine, and the fear of the consequences were too great.

Perceptions of the civilian-state relationship : Russian as citizen, Russian as subject

There is an inherent tension in the way that respondents imagined Russian civilians either as citizens with agency, who had consented and continue to give their support to a totalitarian system, or as subjects with no means to change their political outlook, who had no choice but to be silent. These moral gradations shaped the specific categorizations of enmity.

A recurring theme in my discussions amongst many of my participants was the sense that Russian civilians had consented to a totalitarian system, they had both done so through a perceived absence of meaningful political protest as authoritarian reforms were underway, and through giving ‘economic permission’ to Putin’s regime. As said by Andrii; “His citizens have given him this permission...They have given him this permission economically...to create a system, (this) power system.”. Olga stated; “They believe in their president and the dictatorship. It suits them”.

Interviewees depicted a public whose psyche had been shaped by totalitarianism, for who hyper-centralized top-down rule had become not only normalized, but a superior form of governance – the form of governance which had spared Russia from the economic and social chaos of the 90’s and early 2000’s. As stated by Artem;

“I think a lot of people in Russia think that democracy is kind of a poison or some disease. That a country like Russia cannot be running with, you know, like some democracy way, usually should have this one man who rule for everything”.

There seemed to be a sense of historical continuity in the way that respondents depicted the Russian public’s acceptance of their subjugation to authority; from the Mongol “yoke”, to the serfdom of Tsarist times, to the modernist totalitarianism of the Soviet Union, through to the Putinism of today. There was a certain invisibilisation of the dynamic culture of protest in the

1990's, which was brutally crushed by Yeltsin.

Some interviewees did draw attention to protests in Moscow in recent years, specifying that the only meaningful protests had always been about domestic issues. (Some) mentioned protests against the invasion in its very first days, but pointed out that these were very small-scale protests in relation to protests about domestic issues, painting the Russian public as fundamentally self-interested.

The perceived “cowardice” of the Russian public for not demonstrating in larger numbers or for longer periods, was often directly compared to the fact that Ukraine had experience three large scale “revolutions”, which were seen as catalysing meaningful socio-political change. The 2014 “Revolution of Dignity”, or “Euromaidan”, in which Ukrainians had rallied against Yanukovych and eventually ousted him from power was an obvious point of comparison, as Ukrainians had not been deterred by the shootings of protestors, and instead mobilized in larger numbers after the shootings occurred.

Social atomization was also asserted to be a reason that it would be difficult for Russians to collectively resist the state, with several respondents noting that the scale and diversity of Russia meaning that the Russian society fundamentally lacks ‘bonds’, and hence it is difficult to form solidarity. Stepan stated; “People aren't bonded to each other because there's so much diversity inside of the country, there aren't things to bond them to each other, the way that Ukrainians are bonded to each other”. Andrii said “I think they would all struggle to find views they have in common.”

Loyalty to Putin is seen as disturbingly stable. Bohdan stated; “despite the fact that he has been in power for 25 years, people like him...people are not surprised by it (the fact there have been no elections).” Even dissatisfaction with the country's poor economic outlook and the failures of local governance is often compartmentalized from loyalty to the regime himself, especially towards Putin personally, preserving the myth of a benevolent autocrat. Artem said;

“I think a lot of them (are) like...not satisfied with the action of the Russian government. Because they are not blind and see that the country is poor, and villages are bad, and cities are usually also. But (the problem -) it's not Putin. Putin, it's some like great man who trying to, trying to manage all this shit...they don't see maybe this connection that, like, it starts from Putin.”

There was a certain deal of variation in perceptions as to how active the alignment with Russian state propaganda, and hence active support for the war is. Respondents generally painted the Russian civilian population as ideologically aligned with the government on the invasion of Ukraine. The Russian public was often collectively referred to as “brainwashed” by state propaganda, or as said by Andrii; “the propaganda has liquidated their brains”.

Several respondents asserted that Putin expressed the true beliefs of the Russian public, rather than the Kremlin simply manipulating the public into believing its imperial logic. “They always chose politicians who had an imperial mindset...In his (Putin’s) first candidacy, he was like, (doing) diplomacy and speaking; ‘no, we (will) never (be) on the war with Ukraine’. But then they created imperial person from him. They gave him permission to do it.” (Stepan). It should be noted here Stepan is casting Russian civilians as actively *choosing* their politicians, and that the public “created an imperial person”, rather than these circumstances being forced upon them.

All respondents expressed that Russian civilians had, on the whole, internalized this Russian imperialist ideology; “civilians will support that in regard that they want to conquer all the world. Putin's words, like...that Russia ends nowhere...And many Russians repeat that ‘Russia ends nowhere’...(they believe) that Ukrainians worship the devil...(that) they're all fascists” (Bohdan).

Most respondents stressed that the informational environment was a primary factor for an imperial ideology being entrenched in the psyche of the Russian public, with an inherent belief in the superiority of Russian culture. Yet, when I asked regarding the ideology of the Russian diaspora, and perceived levels of support for the invasion of Ukraine amongst the diaspora, almost all respondents stated that there was probably only a marginal difference in support for the war between Russian nationals inside the Russian Federation, and those in the diaspora. Sometimes they would reframe their initial responses once I had asked about this phenomenon, stating that an imperial mentality is very difficult to reform.

Some occasionally made counter-statements, such as Stepan, who in spite of earlier stressing that that Russians were conditioned into conforming to the imperial ideology espoused by

Russian state propaganda, later stated that the ultimate result of the propaganda was to create a sense of nihilistic apathy. Here, he described Russian society as radically depoliticised, with no clear ideology behind their support for the invasion; “They have a low quality of life and they don't know what to fight for...Because if society is rich by mind and rich by life, they know what they are fighting for”.

Other respondents also depicted Russian society as a depoliticized society which lacked its own meaningful ideals, and was instead motivated solely by money; “The propaganda has liquidated their brains to the point where they cannot understand value that is not intrinsically attached to money. So... They do not understand values like freedom, because it is not intrinsically attached to life - they don't understand what a better life looks like” (Andrii).

Vladyslav described traits that he saw as intrinsic to Russian culture that, in his view, resulted in submission to authority. He argued that the Russian public as a whole possesses a ‘slave-like mentality’, and drew linguistic connections within the Russian language which he believed demonstrated the depth of this internalized sense within the culture. “*Slova robota* (the word for work), it's (a) Russian word - wording is going from word slave – *rab*...And they have a lot of things in Russian language, which is related to the slave or something, you know, because it's begun from this. So they're just slaves, slaves who don't - can't...separate themselves (from their master).”

Vladyslav also went on to argue that Russian culture has been shaped by Soviet prison culture, fostering an internalised sense of collective incarceration. He pointed out that prison slang is so normalized in Russia that it is frequently used performatively in Russian political rhetoric; “Russia still living not only in prison by these rules, but even in *politika*, you know. Putin using some words from prison, and Medvedev always using some words from prison. It's so deeply (in the culture) because the prisoners - the *vory v zakone*, like...“thieves in law,” they took the prison, and they took the government.” He acknowledged that such dynamics existed to some degree in Ukraine as well, though to a far lesser extent; “it's not like in 90s, you know?...We went out from this”.

“It’s a caste system” : Perceptions of class, ethnic minorities, regional dynamics, and exploitation

Most respondents spoke of a perceived system of exploitation within Russia, with two explicitly describing it as a *"caste system"* defined by both class and ethnicity. One respondent characterized the country’s power structure as *"feudal"*. It was stressed that the war was taking an extremely disproportionate toll on poor rural communities, and on Russia’s ethnic minorities. Yet, sympathy was limited.

Moscow described by some as effectively a "state within a state," its residents perceived as living in a different country altogether; “there’s a division there. There is Russia in general, yes, and then there is Moscow. It is separate, like the Vatican in Italy, a state within a state. Moscow and Russia are completely different things...they have this division...Moscow is a kind of higher caste” (Borys).

Moscow and to a lesser extent the other major urban centres were described as both potential centres of resistance to the war and Putin’s regime, as well as sites of exploitation, in the sense that the war primarily effected the country’s poor and peripheral communities. The majority of respondents believed that if any ideological opposition to the invasion of Ukraine existed within Russia, it would most likely be found among the educated urban population — particularly in Moscow and St. Petersburg;

“I think whole Russia is have a lot of differences with these two cities...Moscow and St. Petersburg...in this city’s life, I think more, more like dynamic and more open minded. Maybe. So people have a lot of stuff to do, instead of just sitting and watching TV on the regions and drinking alcohol. So maybe support in these cities for this war is low. Most of people, I think, doesn’t care about this. But most of Russians, they are not living in Moscow or St. Petersburg, they live in those regions” (Artem).

Yet, the civilians of the country’s metropolises were also seen as benefitting from a system of exploitation. Respondents likewise held an ambivalent views of civilians in rural areas - or “the regions,” as they are commonly referred to in both Ukrainian and Russian. While they acknowledged the exploitation of these communities, they also described them in pejorative terms: as passive, heavy drinkers, and the most uncritical consumers of propaganda. Several stressed that many remote areas in the Russian Federation lack internet access, leaving state

television as their sole source of media, with no access to alternative perspectives; “I think that there is a very large population there that does not have access to social networks and information that is different from what is shown on TV...(Like almost 100 million of that population are living in circumstances where they do not have access to the Internet). So they don't know nothing, except the television agenda and propaganda” (Bohdan).

Several respondents also commented on the economic dynamics of military mobilization, that poor, provincial communities are those that bear the brunt of war. Valentina expanded;

“It's always was in history, so the poor, these ones who are poor, they're going to the war. Because the ones who is rich, they can pay something, and not go to the war... The people in the cities support the war, but the people in the regions are (the ones) fighting the war, and they are absolutely decimating these villages.”¹⁴

While discussing the exploitative nature of the war on poor communities in Russia, Bohdan had also noted that inequality was also worsening due to the war;

“A strange thing is happening now with the ‘coffin money’, that widows and mothers receive some millions (of roubles) from the government when their grandfathers or husbands die, and everyone else who did not receive millions is getting poorer and poorer against this background. Therefore, there is a growing division between those who have benefited enormously from the war, even at the cost of losing someone close to them, and those who continue to live in poverty and their situation is getting worse.”

No respondent spoke to the fact that any of these civilians may be conscious of their exploitation, but rather, a running theme was the belief that they had internalized the ‘identity of incarceration’, or a ‘slave mentality’ discussed earlier, as they cannot conceive of an alternative; “they don't understand what a better life looks like.” (Andrii).

Roughly half of my respondents spontaneously addressed the question of ethnic minorities in Russia without being prompted; the remainder addressed the matter after prompting. Ethnic minorities were inherently closely associated with Russia’s more isolated regions.

Respondents typically portrayed them as uneducated, politically disengaged, with very limited access to information due to geographic isolation. A distinction was generally made

¹⁴ It is worth noting that outside of the interview, in private conversations, Vladyslav had mentioned that he also sees these dynamics at play in Ukraine, that it was those with the financial or legal resources who would be spared from the frontline.

between the ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus (Chechens, Dagestanis) and those in Inner Russia or Siberia (Buryats, Tatars et cetera). The Northern Caucasian minorities were characterized by some as possessing a “*mercenary culture*,” perceived to be motivated by financial incentives rather than ideology.

Minorities in Inner Russia and Siberia were described as entirely detached from current events, or in pejorative terms regarding the level of development of their settlements. Vladyslav described them as possessing “no culture...living their stupid life... being happy when they see a toilet”. Several stated that they believe many had very little or negligible knowledge about Ukraine; “50% might say – ‘where is Ukraine?’ ” (Andrii). Borys went as far as to state that he believed there were minorities in this region who were so isolated that they genuinely still believed that the USSR had not yet ended.

Stepan sympathetically pointed to the discrimination faced by ethnic minorities by ethnic Russians from urban backgrounds, and the forced assimilation (russification) that they have experienced; “Russia just killing this small amount of nations. And...treat(ing) them poorly, like if they speak with accent, it's like; ‘Oh, you're not from Moscow or, like, big city...it's probably you are (a) stupid and bad person’.” He stated that if any section of the Russian civilian population was truly neutral in relation to the invasion of Ukraine, it would be Russia’s ethnic minorities. He did note that they had, however, been effected by “many years of propaganda”. Others stressed that many had been effectively Russified, and now identified as part of the pan-Russian community, rather than their own distinct ethnic heritage, and hence might support the war for ideological reasons.

Bohdan stated that the Muslim minorities of the north Caucasus “do not identify themselves as Russians”, but have been manipulated into supporting the invasion through targeted propaganda framed in religious and moral terms, that to not support the war “to be on the side of evil”.

Vladyslav was very critical of what he saw as a lack of national consciousness among these minorities;

“there is a lot of famous guys from Dagestan or Chechnya in UFC (combat sport), but they're still pro-Russian. What the fuck with them? They don’t have their national identity, they didn't feel their nationality. Like, Dagestan now is different country, different culture, different everything, you know,

but they still Russia and everything. Yeah, why is they doing this stupid shit? I don't know. Yeah, this one day should change.”.

No respondents brought focus to the separatist movements originating within these ethnic communities, with the exception of Andrii. I got the impression that most respondents did not know much about Russia’s ethnic minorities, with the exception of Andrii, and had not sought or found it difficult to seek out much information about the minorities. Some, such as Artem, openly acknowledged this; “But it's pretty hard to understand what people think in those regions because there is no information in media to actually notice what they think, what they seem to understand. Not a lot of information from Chechnya, because it's even more terrorist state than Russia...So I don't know. About Russia, we have some info in internet and at least we can, like, say something, thinking about this info, what we can get in internet.”

Even in acknowledging the discrimination experienced and exploitation of the disenfranchised sections of the Russian population, asserting a structural differentiation, respondents nonetheless expressed an essential moral failing; a lack of critical thought, resistance or aspiration.

Assertions of fundamental difference, assertions of similarity

The “axiological balance”, as described by Rothbart and Korostelina varied significantly between respondents. While some respondents stressed a fundamental similarity between Ukrainians and Russians, others emphasised fundamental cultural differences in values, worldview, and cultural protocol.

When asking Vladyslav about what differences he saw between the Ukrainian and Russian publics, he stated; “Everything. Main difference is everything, I think.” The most fundamental point of difference stressed by most participants between Russian and Ukrainian societies was a completely different relationship to freedom. While, as mentioned above, Russians were seen as having come to have an ‘identity of incarceration’ or a ‘slave psyche’, Ukrainians were perceived as motivated above everything else as by a desire for freedom. “Why do you think in Ukraine people were prepared to risk their lives, whereas in Russia people aren't prepared to risk their lives? Because Ukraine is a free country...and (we) love

freedom. Russia is not here. In Ukraine, you can give up your life for freedom, to protect freedom.” (Andrii) This was a common point of antithesis drawn between the two societies; that while Ukrainians are brave, and motivated by ideals, Russians are cowardly, and motivated by little more than money.

A reoccurring theme was that Russia was too atomized to have a coherent “national code”, or coherent ‘cultural code’ dictating interpersonal relations. This was often stressed as a major point of difference with Ukrainians;

“But also, very big difference, I just recognize it, it's about a deep national code. It's about hospitality and about relations with people. Russians is more angry, they're thinking about themselves, Ukrainians are more open to world, to know and everything. Like about Ukrainian hospitality, (people are) talking (about it) all around the world. So it's very famous...You will come to Ukrainian Babushka and she will put your full table of 20 meals.” (Vladyslav)

This was seen as resulting in an essential lack of social harmony in Russia; “People aren't bonded to each other because there's so much diversity inside of the country, there aren't things to bond them to each other, the way that Ukrainians are bonded to each other.” (Stepan)

Multiple interviewees alluded to even more extreme differences; what I would call a fundamental ‘civilisational’ difference, perhaps most extremely articulated by Vladyslav, who spoke to his belief that ‘true’ Russians were in essence an Asiatic people;

“for me, Russians are mostly Mongolian people, Asian people and everything. This is true Russian culture and true Russian people, you know, because if you will come to Moscow, there will be like 60% of Asian...or something like this. And white people is not dominating (demographically)...They're totally different because they're like Mongolian, Asians - they have different values, culture, uh, different views, goals and everything.”

He stressed that the (two century long) occupation by the Mongol Empire had a lasting impact on Russian culture and the mentality of the Russian public and was the catalyst for the ‘slave psyche’ which he described above. He clarified that that he believed East Asian cultures to be significantly more ‘advanced’, but that Russia’s cultural development became stagnant under Mongol occupation; “*Tatara Mongolskaya Iha* occupied Russia...so I think Russian is more about Mongolia and Asian people...(not) Asian people, like Japanese people,

Korean, China. I mean, I think they're more clever. They have more strong culture, but the Russian people is Asian people who stopped in long term occupation.” (Vladyslav)

There was a recurring pattern of stating that while Ukraine possessed an ‘authentic’ and ‘dynamic’ culture, there was a conception that Russian culture was inherently ‘parasitic’, a “weak culture”. Vladyslav listed examples of several of Russia’s most famous bands, and the bands that he believed they were simply imitating; “they're always stealing some ideas and not creating something by their own, you know”. This conceptualisation of Russia as a “parasitic culture”, was found in several other interviews, especially in discussions of how Russia had assimilated elements of Ukrainian culture and claimed them as their own. Some respondents, such as Artem, had difficulty identifying what they perceived as truly “Russian” culture; “I think a lot of them say that their culture is like the best in the world, but I don't know actually what does it mean, “Russian culture”. Maybe for some Russians, it's more about like, (the) past: Pushkin and Leventov, and all this stuff” (Artem).

In a clear example of ‘mirroring’, here while in Russian imperial ideology the “authenticity and uniqueness” of Ukrainian culture is denied, here Ukrainians contests the authenticity and uniqueness of Russian culture, as per Anna Triandafyllidou’s description of the enmity which developed between countries with a historical hybridity of identities in the Balkan region (Kuzio, 2001 : 346).

...

Others reject this assertion of fundamental difference, and expressed a far higher degree of axiological balance. Some negative features of Russian culture were seen as shared by many Ukrainians, especially regarding the avoidance of personal responsibility, and an ability to disassociate from events which do not immediately effect one, even if they effect those around one. Stepan described this shared the attitude through the saying; “*Khata ne moya, moya khata z krayu*” / That house is not mine, mine’s the one on the corner”, a psyche which he said is very common in both Russian and Ukrainian culture. These features were seen as coming the shared Soviet heritage; “there is not some sort of profound difference between the two countries that was not exploited by the powers that be, that created a circumstance that caused us to be enemies. If someone had not manufactured this kind of a narrative, a war like this would not have happened, and we would have been able to just continue existing the way

that we existed.” (Bohdan, find original). Here the political class is depicted as the true enemy, rather than a manipulated Russian public.

Borys likewise stated that he believed Russians and Ukrainians shared much in common; “Ukrainians and Russians have very similar mentalities, very similar outlooks on life. We have similar religions, similar cultures. We have a lot of similar relationships to things”. Stepan claimed that many Ukrainians, just like Russians, were not particularly critical thinkers. He likewise elaborated that;

“I don't see big difference (between Russian and Ukrainian) civilian people, because a lot of Ukrainian civilian people is, like, we don't want to do anything, if Russia will be here, we will be okay with it. It's a big amount of people who just living life and ‘I'm just okay with it’. I think a lot of true patriots go to the war on first day. And then who (is) left? It's like in all countries. Like, 20% is people who bringing goods in country and someone who left, it's like people who don't care.”

I feel that Stepan’s claim here that many do not particularly care whether they are under Ukrainian or Russian governance is quite a rare opinion to find in Ukraine. But these statements taken as a whole are important data nonetheless, in that it shows that there is ideological variation in relation to national identity and expressions of unity within the ‘in-group’ of the Ukrainian public.

Three respondents held space for future reconciliation with Russians, citing that German and Jewish communities have come to now have a normalized relationship. The remainder said that they could never imagine this happening, and cited the hundreds of years of imperial domination faced by the Russians. As fatalistically said by Valentina; “if it hasn’t changed in 300 years, why would it change now?”

On a side note, the in-group was certainly not represented as possessing total unity by all respondents. Vladyslav brought into focus the phenomenon of the internal enemy. When he broke down who he considered his enemies on the ‘spectrum of enmity’, he also mentioned;

“We are different with Russia, but some people hold the same with their minds. We also have a lot of stupid people in Ukraine who...like 15 percent or something...who do not support Russian war, like, but didn't want to change by themselves....But we have also a big percentage in Ukraine who silently support Russian war. They didn't want to tell anything, but they, like, have a position, okay, let's finish it, give them what they want, like, why you didn't give them in the beginning? You know,

you should talk, like, do some positive compromises.”

Conclusion to findings and analysis

On the whole a “low axiological balance” was exhibited by the respondents, where the Russian civilian population were described in essentialist terms, rather than their behaviour being construed as only the result of specific political circumstances. The “negative interdependence” described by Herbert Kelman (1999) was very evident from the majority of respondents that the Russian were described by most as everything that the Ukrainian was not, and herein lay the essence of an enemy image; while the Ukrainian civilian was a ‘lover and defender of freedom’, the Russian civilian was ‘content with his slavehood’, and possessed no dignity. The Ukrainian civilian was brave, his Russian equivalent a coward. While Ukrainian civilians were motivated by progressive ideals, Russian civilians were motivated either by money *or* by a regressive imperialist ideology. Yet there were contradictions within this enemy image. The Russian civilians were described by many as complicit through their passivity in the face of their totalitarian circumstances, and yet their scope for possible action was often acknowledged as very small. The Russian civilians were both zealots who live by an imperialist ideology, and yet they also “believe in nothing”, except perhaps money.

The crystallisation of a coherent enemy image into a coherent collective enmity was fractured along certain lines amongst my sample, with three respondents in particular contesting this binary view of the historically entangled Russian and Ukrainian populations. These respondents displayed a higher degree of “axiological balance”, claiming that the Russian civilians’ behaviour was the result of their totalitarian circumstances, not due to primordial qualities which defined Russians. These respondents asserted that there were a range of qualities shared by both populations.

To return to Rothbart and Korostelina’s axes of analysis, I would summarise the following:

(1) Homogenization/differentiation of the other/enemy. The respondents, although some showed trends towards total enmity, expressed a structural differentiation in the Russian civilian population. This differentiation was expressed across class, regional and ethnic lines. It was acknowledged that there were some members of the population who were taking action to support Ukraine, including sabotaging military infrastructure and conscription offices, and

providing both funds and intelligence to the Ukrainian armed forces. Some were described as spreading information critical of the Putin regime. Yet, these were seen as an extremely small minority.

(2) *The scope of enemy categorization.* There was significant variance in the scope of enemy categorization, with some expressing that only the most active supporters of the invasion of Ukraine were considered enemies, and others expressing a more totalizing form of enmity, in which all Russian civilians were enemies except those who were taking the most active measures to support Ukraine (mentioned above). Sometimes this latter perspective may have been informed by the belief that male civilians are also “potential enemies on the battlefield”.

(3) *The resistance to re-evaluation of enemy status.* Here, there was also significant variation in opinion, with some unable to imagine a future in which Russian society as a whole was not a threat to Ukraine. These respondents expressed such essentialist beliefs about Russian civilians that they seemed unlikely to re-evaluate their status as enemies, let alone to forgive them. Others stressed historical examples of profound enmity being overcome, and stated that they could imagine a future in which Russians were no longer considered enemies of Ukraine.

Discussion

Applicability of previous literature

When I began conducting my data analysis I realised that the failure of many scholars to distinguish between individual and collective forms of enmity had hampered the framework which I was attempting to build upon. My primary unit of analysis was individual enmity, and I attempted to glean a sense of the construction of collective enmity through first analysing the subjectivity of my respondents. The term enmity has not always well defined in the literature, due to being one element of a broader “socio-psychological” infrastructure which develops in conflict contexts. This additionally was a complicating factor in my research.

The contributions of Daniel Rothbart and Karina Korostelina have been valuable in foregrounding the cognitive architecture of enmification. However, while conducting my

analysis, I gained the impression that Korostelina and Rothbart may have neglected the depth of heterogeneity of in-group opinion, and their framework was insufficient to explain the diversity of perceptions from my sample. This is partially as Rothbart and Korostelina apply this specific framework only to cases where they identify total enmity as present, and do not sufficiently elaborate on the factors that might subvert the formation of total enmity. Moreover, their case studies focus exclusively on historical examples, such as Japanese military perceptions of Chinese civilians in Nanking during WWII, Soviet attitudes toward Crimean Tatars during the Stalinist era, and Hutu perceptions of Tutsis in the 1990s. Hence, the engagement with data was mainly limited to political rhetoric as the primary source material, making *collective enmity*, rather than *individual enmity*, their main unit of analysis. In contrast, my research is primarily concerned with individual perceptions.

Rothbart and Korostelina's focus, shared by many of their collaborators, including Hugo Slim, often centres on the forms of enmity between an occupying army and an occupied civilian population. This leaves important conceptual gaps regarding civilian-to-civilian enmity across enemy lines. This is particularly salient for my research, which investigates the form of enmity experienced by an occupied public toward the civilian population of a rival occupying society. Although Daniel Bar-Tal has explored related terrain in his work on forms of individual enmity amongst the Palestinian civilian population toward the Israeli public (Bar-Tal, 2007), the historical and cultural conditions of this context have marked differences. The Russo-Ukrainian case demands a specific approach to understanding how enmity is constructed and negotiated at the level of the civilian sphere.

Ambivalence as an analytical axis

One of the most striking findings of this research was the degree of ambivalence both between and within the participants' responses. The result was not a stable enemy image and associated axiological framework, but an unstable, sometimes contradictory negotiation of complicity and guilt. Existing literature has insufficiently addressed the importance of this ambivalence. Contemporary enmity studies have historically overstressed totalizing forms of enemy construction, often neglecting the conditional and affective ambivalences that characterize real-world enmity processes (Becke et al, 2023). This has been emphasized in recent years by a group of scholars based at Heidelberg University; "Enmity studies therefore need to place a stronger and empirically grounded emphasis on the affects that cause, reflect, and shape the ambivalences of enmity" (Ibid : 10 - 11).

These scholars have argued for a more empirically grounded study of enmity's subjective emotional contradictions and emphasize that the ambivalence of enmity, rather than its coherence, often reveals the most analytically rich terrain. Unfortunately, this school of thought has been so far more principally focussed on historical forms of analysis, so I had a very limited pool of research to draw on.

The ambivalence in my data is likely shaped by a range of factors. Perhaps most significant is the fact that even though we can understand the Russo-Ukrainian conflict as a protracted conflict, the consolidation of enmity towards the Russian public seems to have only crystallized for most Ukrainians as late as the full-scale invasion in 2022, with enmity previously reserved for the political and military establishment. As Korostelina has indicated, it may take a significant period of time ("generations of degrading stories"), before "the ingroup becomes incapable of understanding and perceiving the Other" (Korostelina, 2009 : 108). A longitudinal study would be necessary to reveal if patterns of ambivalence dissipate over time in favour total enmity. The totalitarian nature of the Russian political system seems to be another clear factor, regarding the lack of agency of Russian civilians. The civilians are alternately cast both as unwilling subjects who the system has been forced upon, and as complicit citizens, who condone and support the totalitarian state, and their conditions under it. These factors produced moral contradictions that complicated any singular enemy image.

Additionally, affect is a major factor in the trend towards totalizing enmity. The depth of exposure to Russian military violence and associated loss could be another contributing factor, with those who I had interviewed in Kyiv less effected by the war than those in frontline or occupied regions. Fieldwork by Korostelina and collaborators in Ukraine found that exposure to war related violence significantly shaped respondents' opinions their willingness to support peace negotiations; "the loss of a friend, neighbour, or colleague predicted a preference to continue the war" (Korostelina et al, 2024). Although this data was not related to enmity specifically, it points to the fact that psychological distress *may* effect the depth of enmity experienced. Although one of my respondents had lost her husband to the war on the frontline, the sample is too small to make any evaluation. The depth of historical entanglement between Russian and Ukrainian publics is possibly another factor, one that requires substantial elaboration.

Soviet coloniality / the rejection of hybridity

The resistance of some participants to asserting clear cut boundaries between the in-group and out-group may be to do with the hangover of Soviet/post-Soviet coloniality. As Epp Annus argues, “Soviet colonialism destabilized simplified binarisms and essentialist models” between colonizer and colonized, producing hybrid identities. She states that this is often most evident at the level of individual subjectivity; “categorizations of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘colonizer and colonized,’ form a general cultural framework that singular experience will sometimes contest” (Ibid : 172).

This would explain the retention of cordial relationships for most Ukrainians with the Russian public, even after 2014, many of which lasted until 2022. The impression I gained from my fieldwork was that the everyday Russian civilian did not stand for the colonizer/occupier, but rather another whose history was shaped by many of the same factors as the Ukrainian experience; the worst excesses of Soviet dominance, the economic turmoil of the first year after independence, and as a result there was a lingering affective bond. To recall Vladyslav regarding his design collaboration with Russian artists; “We created this concept about unity, about brotherhood, about brothers, nations and everything, because this information were inside of all of us.” Rather, I believe, the enmity was projected at the Russian political class, who were the true architects and beneficiaries of the exploitation Ukrainians faced, as well as internal enemies who faced a more immediate threat to everyday Ukrainians.

While some respondents may be influenced by this lingering sense of hybridity, others have rejected it in favour of essentialist definitions of the in-group and out-group. For many respondents, unless they have made an active effort to undermine the Russian war effort, the Russian civilian has come to stand for the enemy: the colonizer, the occupier. This recalls the same means through which Muslim Bosniaks came to be referred to as “Turks” by Serbian nationalists, and hence represented as embodiments of historical Ottoman repression of Serbs in the Balkan region (Jovanović, 2012; Suljagić, 2021). The assertion of difference seems to have become an assertion of sovereignty, and any potential ambiguity, or expressions of hybridity is seen as a risk to this sovereignty. For others, asserting this binary distinction was not essential, and only designated the Russian army and their most fervent supporters as the enemy – the literal occupiers of Ukrainian territory. But those that expressed this opinion often acknowledged that it may be seen as a transgressive opinion to hold. It is worth noting

that the two respondents who continued speaking Russian in their personal life fell into this category.

The consolidation of national identity and the sanitization of national memory

The construction of an enemy image that extends beyond the Russian political/military spheres to the civilian sphere, and hence to encompass Russianness itself has been an essential part of the new consolidation of Ukrainian national identity. My findings provided very strong evidence for the thesis that Ukrainian national identity has come to be defined against ‘Russianness’, and supported Kelman’s theory of a negative interdependence forming between these two national identities, that “asserting one group’s identity requires negating the identity of the other...either we are a nation or they are” (Kelman, 1987 : 354). This was evident in claims from some participants that they felt Russian civilians did not have a right to live, and that the only way they could imagine a future where Russia was not a threat to Ukraine was if it were to break up into the smaller nations that the current territory originally comprised of before the expansion of the Russian Empire.

However, the imprint of regional identities may still have some impact on the particular forms of enmity, as per Borys’ perspectives having grown up in Luhansk, or Bohdan’s perspective as a Russophone Ukrainian from the Left Bank of Kyiv. My research would have required a larger sample to know for sure.

The enemy image is fundamentally interdependent in nature; the construction of the collective guilt of Russian society has been accompanied by its inverse - the construction of the moral purity of Ukrainian society - in order to reinforce this binary. The construction of the enemy image has required the systematic curation of national memory, both through the dissemination of revisionist historical narratives in the public sphere and the erasure of information related to Ukraine’s interwar period (Cohen, 2016). A systematic process of de-Russification through the removal of signifiers of Russian influence has simultaneously been carried out in conjunction with the erasure of ambiguities and problematic facts about the history of Ukrainian nationalist organisations in the early-mid 20th century, most centrally by the Ukrainian Institute for National Memory (Kasianov, 2024). A series of pogroms and acts of ethnic cleansing of Jews and Poles have been expunged from the archival record, and the responsible partisan organisations have become celebrated at the state level as national heroes (Cohen, 2016), although this has not been without resistance from certain regions and sectors

of society (Kasianov, 2024). Such a framework allows for the dissemination of a mythic logic, in which Ukrainian collaboration with the Third Reich is minimized. It is far easier to cast the Ukrainian public as individualistic, progressive ‘lovers and defenders of freedom’, cast against its antithesis, a collectivistic Russian public who stand for ‘Eastern despotism’, a people who revere authority, and are ‘content with their slavehood’.

The fact that one of the core motives in Russian political rhetoric legitimising the invasion of Ukraine is to “de-nazify” the political system and society more broadly complicates the manipulation of this history. But instead of the contemporary Ukrainian state choosing to distance themselves from Stepan Bandera and the interwar partisans, instead a selective remembrance and rewriting of history is taking place. It has been observed that; the “lack of self-criticism, the unwillingness to deal critically with ‘difficult’ aspects of the Ukrainian history, is now exploited by Putin.” (Rossolinski-Liebe & Williams, 2022).

The problem of the ‘enemy within’ / the complexity of in-group boundaries

The binary moral designations linked directly to territory used by Rothbart and Korostelina seem too simplistic for the Russo-Ukrainian conflict context; “Birth in the sacred realm (the homeland) secures one’s virtues, whereas birth in the enemy region confers a stigma that is linked to profane foreign territory” (88). Enmification has not occurred along clear nationally or territorially demarcated lines in Ukraine. Prior to the full-scale invasion, ‘internal enemies’ held the most prescience in the consciousness of the Ukrainian public; be it the ‘fifth column’, the separatists and their collaborators during the hybrid phase of the conflict (2014-2022), or local oligarchs and their *titushka*, local heavies who harass or intimidate (Mykhed, 2024). Some local commentators have made a somewhat simplistic observation that; “it doesn’t matter how much Ukrainians *chubliatsia*, or quarrel, among ourselves (the Ukrainian word *chubytytsya* literally means to ‘pull the hair of the other Cossack’), in the face of the enemy we are one...just like hundreds of years ago” (Ibid : 2). This assertion of total national unity against a common enemy, Russian society as a totality, neglects the phenomenon of the internal enemy.

The enmification of other Ukrainians by Ukrainians is a complex matter, one that requires its own line of research. It is understandable that Ukrainians who openly support reunification with Russia (as mentioned by Vladyslav) would be categorized as enemies, but it seems that individuals who contest the hegemonic narrative espoused by the Ukrainian government and

contest the sanitization of collective national memory are at risk of falling into the enemy category. In an open letter signed by a wide range of scholars, it was noted that in Ukraine;

“we are witnessing an alarming rise in harassment, threats, and persecution—often stemming from nationalist activism and public campaigns — targeting scholars...working on sensitive, underexamined, and often politically inconvenient topics such as the far right, ethnonationalism, and democratic backsliding in Ukraine” (New Global Politics, 2025).

To question these matters is to effectively contest the “sociopsychological infrastructure” described by Bar-Tal, which “becomes hegemonic, rigid, and resistant to change as long as the intractable conflict continues.” (2009 : 1430).

Critique of Huntertonian theory : on ‘civilisational’ identity

I would argue that my findings also make a strong counterpoint to Samuel Huntington’s assertion that in a post-ideological geopolitical arena, future conflicts would be fought on a ‘civilisational’ basis, based on perceived civilisational identities (Huntington, 1996).

Huntington effectively made a case against enmity developing between Ukrainian and Russian societies, stating that Ukrainians and Russians share a civilisational identity, based on their shared cultural traits and historical entanglement; “If civilization is what counts, however, violence between Ukrainians and Russians is unlikely. These are two Slavic, primarily Orthodox peoples who have had close relationships for centuries and between whom intermarriage is common” (Huntington, 1996). He did add a layer of nuance, acknowledging, “A second and somewhat more likely possibility is that Ukraine could split along its fault line into two separate entities, the eastern of which would merge with Russia”, here citing the country’s regional identities as the catalyst of this potential outcome.

In my findings we see some of my respondents make the assertion of fundamental civilisational difference, in spite of having a close sense of kinship only a decade earlier. Here we see that both enmity and a perceived sense of civilisational identity are fluid. They are contingent on specific political circumstances (Becke et al, 2022). Shared traits can be swiftly transformed into profound collective enmity, as in the Indo-Pakistani case. Andrew Wilson has also critiqued Huntington’s simplistic position, stating that his work is effectively in line with the world view of Russian nationalists; “Just because a majority of the population uses the Byzantine liturgy, it hardly follows that Ukraine will always be a part of the same

‘civilisation’ as Russia. The fact that Huntington’s views coincide with those of extreme Russian nationalists should make one wary of both” (Wilson, 2022 : 304).

Limitations of research

The size of my sample is an obvious limitation to my research; and it is hard to generalize my results without a larger sample, but this is naturally outside the scope of a master’s thesis. I realise in hindsight that although the use of the ‘spectrum of enmity’ in my research allowed to open up a certain degree of nuance in terms of discussing various degrees of support for the invasion of Ukraine, it also may have conditioned the way that my respondents were imagining the Russian civilian population. Sometimes the respondents would, however, take the initiative and state that they did not see a difference between neutral civilians and passive opponents, for instance, which mitigated this limitation to a certain extent. I am curious as to whether I would have gained more totalizing expressions of enmity had I not used the spectrum, and had instead asked participants to draw a visual depiction of Russian society depicting different sectors of society based in their level of support for the war in the manner which spontaneously came to the respondent.

The use of the term “civilian” may have also very subtly led the researcher. The word civilian, after all, is generally utilized to stress the ‘innocence’ of the non-combatant, as opposed to the combatant. There is a small chance that respondents may have subconsciously rejected this distinction and the presumption of potential ‘innocence’, and I wonder if it may have been more fitting to have conducted interviews referring to the “Russian *public*”.

I additionally wish I had inquired regarding whether respondents considered Russian civilians supporting Ukraine to be Russian, and I wish I had asked the same question regarding ethnic minorities, to understand how they conceptualised Russianness.

Strategic implications of research

“The logic of ambivalent enmity is to ask: To defeat the enemy, should one not try to learn from them?” (Becke et al, 2023 : 8). While, I have to admit, I am repurposing the original intention of this quote, I think it makes a good case for Ukrainians attempting to overcome totalizing trends of enmity. In World War Two, both Nazi Germany and Britain had a certain amount of faith in the agency of the civilian populations of their enemy, and the critical

ability of this population to resist government propaganda. Most notably, the “Political Warfare Executive” of Britain, lead by Sefton Delmer, attempted to mobilise sectors of German civilian society, be they subversive socialists, or liberal Germans who were opposed to the Third Reich (Pomerantsev, 2024).

Of note is the fact that the Ukrainian government, armed forces, and civil society more broadly, have essentially extinguished all contact with both the Russian civilian population and with dissidents more broadly. I believe it is counterproductive to completely operate completely siloed off from one another, although, naturally, a very sensitive matter.

Whether the Ukrainian state is engaged in substantial influence operations aimed at the Russian civilian population is, naturally, highly confidential information. However, the operations that have come to light, such as the HUR (Ukrainian military intelligence) dismantling over 100 Russian websites which endorse the war effort, have been more involved in invoking fear in the civilian population than in destabilizing faith in Putin’s regime. The campaign froze these websites, and replaced the homepage with an image of a butchered pig’s head overlaid with the Russian tricolor (Kyiv Independent, 2024). Is this the most effective use of the HUR’s resources?

At a literature festival in Kyiv earlier this year, Peter Pomerantsev invited the audience to imagine an information warfare campaign on the scale of Sefton Delmer’s operation conducted to subvert Russian support for the Putin regime, and from support for the war in Ukraine. “Imagine we could create media where 50% of Russian soldiers tuned in...imagine if we could do something of that power” (Pomerantsev, 2025). Although here he was speaking to the Russian military sphere, he expanded the conversation to imagine what it might mean if such an influence operation were expanded to the civilian sphere. If the war cannot be won on military terms or economic terms, could it be won through influence operations, operations that encouraged revolutionary action? Such an operation would require Ukrainians to suspend any consolidated sense of enmity in which Russian civilians are imagined in essentialist terms, as incapable of change. To conduct such an operation would require imagining that these changes are possible in the first place.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how Ukrainian civilians define the "enemy" within the Russian civilian sphere in the aftermath of the 2022 full-scale invasion. Against a backdrop of deep historical entanglement, the war has catalysed a rupture in civilian-to-civilian relations. While Ukrainian political rhetoric has increasingly painted the Russian public as a monolithic and complicit collective, mirroring patterns of total enmity found in other protracted conflicts, this research complicates that narrative by foregrounding the variability, ambivalence, and affective contradictions present in individual forms of enmity expressed by Ukrainian civilians.

Through the qualitative analysis of interview data, this study has shown that enemy images among Ukrainians are far from uniform. Some respondents echoed the absolutist claims of Ukrainian political rhetoric, perceiving Russian civilians as morally culpable through their silence or apathy. Others, however, expressed reservations about such generalizations, citing the complexities of life in totalitarian conditions. This moral tension challenges the theoretical assumption that total enmity is the norm, and is generally internalized by civilian populations.

Naturally, I am not in a place to make too strong a contestation of the literature from the data drawn from such a small sample, but I think it draws attention to the fact that personal enmity has been neglected as a unit of analysis in previous enmity studies, and to focus on the subjectivity of individuals in a broader study may complicate the coherence of collective enmity which is sometimes assumed in the field.

My research concluded that an insufficient distinction between personal enmity and collective enmity as units of analysis in previous research has muddled some of the previous literature. Many studies have relied on historical forms of analysis, relying on analyses of collective enmity which are 'institutionalised' from the top down. I agree with the work of Johannes Becke and his collaborators (2023) that the ambivalence of enmity is much-neglected area of inquiry that requires more analysis.

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