

DEHUMANIZING THE “ENEMY”

Hate speech directed at Ukrainians in Russian media

by **Yuliya Krylova-Grek**

The impact of negative rhetoric towards Ukraine, the United States and European countries are the constant ingredients in the “menu” of Russian state media resources, not to mention blogs and social networks.

Previous examples such as Rwanda and Srebrenica have shown how words of hatred lead to acts of hatred, with yesterday’s civilians being ready to kill their dehumanized neighbors. Unfortunately, one now can add to this list of examples Ukraine. Hate speech towards Ukraine began to gain momentum since 2014, after the “Revolution of Dignity” took place and the country was taking a political course towards European integration. Against the background of horror stories about Europe and the US dictatorship, the main target was Ukraine, and everything related to the Ukrainian language, culture and “Ukrainianness”,¹ a concept used in the Russian media with a negative meaning.² Almost every day, hate rhetoric was spread through the Russia’s

main state channels, reaching the audience in Russia, occupied Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions.

Investigating the activities of the Russian media in 2014–2021, I wrote that the systematic character and the scale of the creation and distribution of such materials in the information space have signs of preparation for genocide.³ But no one could have imagined that this crime could happen in the center of Europe in the 21st century.

THE STUDY OF the content of Russian media operating in the occupied territories of Crimea and eastern Ukraine was conducted in the period of December 1, 2020, to May 31, 2021. It is important to note that after gaining control over these regions in 2014, Russia launched active propaganda activities, an integral part of which were the materials aimed at dehumanization, demonization and marginalization of Ukraine and Ukrainians. Publishing houses

remaining in the regions have adapted to the new government (for example, *ForPost*) and new publishing houses (for example, *Politnavigator*, *Novorossiya*, *Russkaya Vesna*, etc.) have been formed.

As a result of the study, it was found that before the military intervention, Russian media had used indirect and manipulative hate speech, avoiding direct calls for destruction, which could have created the illusion of compliance with journalistic standards. At the same time, journalists practiced the active use of negative narration: compilation of negative events, indirect and manipulative hate speech.

Eight years of systematic spread of negative narration have done their job and led to a dehumanized, demonized, and marginalized image of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the minds of Russians. The image of a dangerous and aggressive enemy was created using a range of methods and techniques, the most common of which was the use of archetypes of the Second World War and Soviet stereotypes. Ukrainianness in Russian content was equated with Nazism and fascism, and people were called Nazis, fascists, Banderas, whom Russian journalists described as aggressive creatures with a low level of intelligence. For example, about the people who took part in the march dedicated to the birthday of Stepan Bandera “[...] there are going fools and half-fools, I do not dispute intelligence abilities”.⁴

IN THE RUSSIAN mass media, the phenomenon of *banderophobia* plays the role of a “horror story” for an ordinary citizen. In the Russian mentality, “banderophobia” is one of the fundamental, negative ideas about Ukraine, but, at the same time it has little in common with Bandera movement as a real phenomenon of Ukrainian history. Rather, I would argue, it is a mythologized construct on a Ukrainian topic. Bandera, Bandera people and other words derived from the surname of Stepan Bandera turned into a generalized horror symbol, actively used in many publications.⁵

Another generally accepted technique is the creation of new concepts with a negative meaning. Typically, these words are formed by combining two words into one or by changing and adding a new ending to the word. For example, “potheads”, “sprechenführer”, “languass policy”⁶, “shiroes”.⁷ The newly created concepts and their offensive meanings can be understood only in the Russian and Ukrainian language space. Therefore, for foreigners, I have created a special dictionary with the explanation of terms, which is placed in the addendum to the study.⁸ The main topics on which the Russian media built the negative narrative were as follows: 1) in relation to citizens who support “Ukrainianness”, participants in the Revolution of Dignity, supporters of European integration, associating them with the Nazis, Banderas and fascists, 2) in relation to the Ukrainian state

as an unsuccessful project, a territory that should not exist,⁹ 3) the Ukrainian language as a dialect of uneducated citizens,¹⁰ 4) the Ukrainian army which in the rhetoric of the Russian media was called punishers, murderers and fascists,¹¹ 5) Ukrainian education as a tool for educating the Nazis,¹² 6) the topic of opposing citizens within the country and their division into “good (pro-Russian) and bad (pro-Ukrainian) ones”.¹³ By the way, a few months after the outbreak of military activities, the topic of division almost disappeared from the information space, instead, there appeared in the rhetoric of Russian journalists only a “bad” group to which belonged all Ukrainians.

AGAINST THE BACKGROUND of demonized Ukraine and Ukrainians, the Russian media started to voice calls for specific actions: “Fascist Ukraine does not have the right to exist”,¹⁴ and the term “special operation” began to be used as practical advice for “solving the Ukrainian question”.¹⁵

So, with the image of an “underdog” (Untermensch) in mind created by the mass media, the majority of Russian citizens support military aggression, as evidenced by the results of a sociological survey: as of March 5, 2022, 71% of the polled residents of Russia supported the “special operation” against Ukraine.¹⁶ The behavior of the Russian military, who carry out massacres and torture of civilians and prisoners of war, can be seen also as evidence that hateful propaganda in the mass media has achieved its goal.

Let us dwell in more detail on the content which was distributed by the Russian media since 2014 to prepare

and justify the planned military aggression. I would like to draw your attention to the methods and techniques used by journalists, as they can be used in any mass media and be a signal of a campaign to spread hate speech.¹⁷

As noted above, as a result of the study, it was found that indirect and manipulative hate speech was actively used in the information space. The study was conducted on the material of journalistic publications issued during the period of December 1, 2020, to May 31, 2021. The material for the study was selected by keywords using a content analysis program. We analyzed online media with an audience of more than 1 million readers per month. The sample set included 10 news websites: *Forpost Sevastopol*, *Novosti Kryma*, *RIA Krym*, *KP Krym*, *Russkaya vesna*, *Politnavigator*, *Novorossinform*, *Krym24*, *Vesti Krym* and the official website of the “government” of Crimea (Pravitel’stvo Kryma) to see the local government rhetoric.

Altogether we obtained 560 publications featuring hate speech elements selected from the entire content. These include 16 texts with Direct Hate Speech, 341 texts with Hidden Hate Speech and 203 texts with Manipulative Hate Speech.

Indirect hate speech is characterized by the following: the use

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of words that are allowed by literary norms (present in general lexical dictionaries), but in the context carry an offensive meaning (for example, the words “thief” or “looter” when used in criminal proceedings have a direct meaning. At the same time, their use in relation to a group of persons by region of residence or civic affiliation is a sign of marginalization: “Looting Galicians”,¹⁸ “90% of the citizens of Ukraine are thieves”¹⁹; the use of ethnophaulisms in relation to the people, nationality, nation (for example, “khokhlys”); the division of society according to the principle of “our own people vs. strangers”; generalization of negative features;¹⁰ transfer of a separate case to a group of persons on a certain basis (nationality, religion, sexual orientation, etc.); masking contempt with sarcasm and irony with a tinge of disdain and negative attitudes (e.g., writing phonetic pronunciation in quotes “svidomye” (“conscious”), Kiev is the capital of “Tseevropa” (“Thisiseurope”)²⁰); creation of new concepts with a negative connotation (for example, “Ukroparanotics”, “Ukrolunacy”)²¹; the use of the archetypes of the Second World War and the creation of negative associations on their basis.

Manipulative hate speech involves techniques for substituting meanings of concepts through the use of Euphemisms and Dysphemisms.²²

Euphemism is an inoffensive word or phrase substituted for one considered offensive or hurtful. For example, “a good will gesture” instead of withdrawal of the Russian garrison from the island of Zmiyiny, “clap” instead of an explosion. By the way, the Russian word “clap” (loud sound) has a homograph in Russian translated into Ukrainian as “cotton”. On this semantic game of meanings, the Ukrainian mass media began to use the word “cotton” as a synonym for “explosion”.

Dysphemism is the substitution of a harsh, disparaging, or unpleasant expression for a more neutral one. For example, the training program of the Ukrainian military is a “sophisticated program”, the servicemen of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are “militants”, and their training is “drilling” (like the dog training).²³

MANIPULATIVE TECHNIQUES also include the technique of using fake news as a fact on the basis of which the publication is written; involvement of experts who have a biased opinion or are not specialists in the field they comment on; distortion and subjective interpretation of historical facts;²⁴ justification of aggression, violence against a certain group of persons on the basis of speculative conclusions about their danger and actions to prevent it; strengthening information by non-linguistic means (photos, collages, etc.); manipulative titles of publications (the name is considered manipulative if it does not coincide with the information provided in the text of the article, or distorts it).

Indirect and manipulative hate speech was used mostly before and at the beginning of the military aggression and was served “under the guise of ‘liberation’”. After several months of war, the Russian propaganda changed the narrative from a mission of “liberation” to open calls for the destruction of Ukraine as a state²⁵ and the destruction of everything related to Ukrainianness.²⁶ At the same time, we should investigate the origins of genocide manifestations, which are now documented by lawyers and public activists: they have their roots in 2014, when the Russian media space was actively filled with materials that changed the attitude towards Ukrainians from the “brotherly people” to the inhabitants of the “Nazi state” and the support for the so-called “denazification”.²⁷

The very concept of “denazification” appeared after the Second World War to designate a system of measures aimed at eliminating Nazism (fascism) in the political, economic, and public life of the German people after the defeat of the Hitler’s Germany.²⁸ The concept of “denazification” in relation to Ukraine

sounds like a threat, since its meaning in the context of the Russian aggression is the call for the fight against Ukrainianness.

“AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF WAR, THE RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA CHANGED THE NARRATIVE FROM A MISSION OF ‘LIBERATION’ TO OPEN CALLS FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF UKRAINE AS A STATE.”

WHAT DOES ACTUALLY the used term denazification of Ukraine mean, to which Russian political forces call and which is supported by Russian propaganda in the media space?

The word contains the prefix “de” (Russian), which in Russian denotes the negation or difference from something. The second part of the word “nazification” is used

as a derivative of the word “Nazi”, to which the Russian media referred Ukrainians as carriers of national identity, especially in relation to the participants of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity and the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Journalists deliberately put a sign of equality between Ukrainians and the negative archetypes of the Second World War, massively using such expressions as “Ukrainian Nazis”,²⁹ “Glory to Ukraine, glory to heroes” is a Nazi slogan,³⁰ “Nazi state”³¹ (referring to Ukraine), “Nazis”³¹, “Ukronazism”,³² etc. Among other things, it happens that Russian journalists in media put an equal sign between “Ukrainian Nazism” and fascism, creating an image of a fascist and Nazi country, for example, referring to Zelensky’s trip to Donbas as “[...] a typical Nazi method of activating full-scale combat actions”, referring to the government of Ukraine as “the source of fascism, death and elimination of Ukraine [...]”.³³

The artificially created concept of “Ukrainian Nazism” is aimed to show Ukrainians as carriers of neo-Nazi ideology, which is condemned and considered dangerous in the civilized world.³⁴

The analysis of the Russian media showed that the markers of Nazism were Ukrainian language, the desire for European integration, the Ukrainian culture, service in the Armed Forces of

Ukraine and belonging to the movement of the Ukrainian nationalists. It is important to note that the referring to the Ukrainian nationalists as to Nazis is based on the phonetic similarity of words, although these concepts are different in meaning.

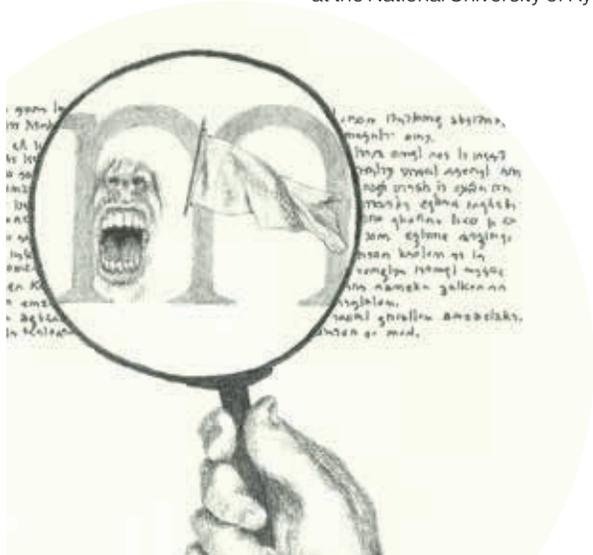
Taking into account the propaganda and the hate speech spread by the Russian journalists before the war, the concept of “denazification” in this analysis implies depriving Ukrainians of national signs of identity, language, culture and turning them into a second-rate part of the Russian world.³⁵

Today, the work is underway to collect materials proving the planned character of “denazification” or acts of genocide on the territory of Ukraine. The author’s work is to conduct a psycholinguistic analysis of the collected materials³⁶ to substantiate the accusations of the Russian journalists in calls and incitement to genocide, which have been taking place in Ukraine since the beginning of the military aggression.

AFTER FEBRUARY 24, 2022, Russian main stream mass media continue to actively spread hatred, dehumanizing, demonizing, and marginalizing Ukraine and Ukrainians: from accusations about the terror of the Russian-speaking population³⁷, to the call for “desatanization of Ukraine” (meaning “destruction of Satan” represented by Ukrainians)³⁸ and “war against absolute evil”, which the Russian journalist V. Solovyov associates with Ukraine and NATO.³⁹ And some Russian journalists allow themselves to talk publicly about the extermination of Ukrainians, for example, journalist Anton Krasovsky, who said that children complaining about the Russian occupation should be destroyed, “drown in the Tysyna (river)” or “burn them up”.⁴⁰

The conducted study showed that since 2014, the Russian mass media have been systematically working to create a dehumanized, marginalized, and demonized image of Ukraine and Ukrainians, which became the basis for war crimes and an approving attitude to the aggression of the majority of Russian citizens. Moreover, Russian journalists who had actively used indirect and manipulative hate speech until February 24, 2022, a few weeks after the start of the war, began to use direct appeals and insults against everything related to Ukraine (state, language, culture) and Ukrainians. ❌

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