

The Representation of External Threats

From the Middle Ages to the Modern World

Edited by

Eberhard Crailsheim
María Dolores Elizalde



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The Opposition of Own/Alien as a Source of the External Threat: Reflections on Supra-State Sovereignization Politics and 19th-Century Pan-Slavism

Vladimir Belous

Classical Antiquity held the idyllic and harmonious relationship between different peoples as a natural condition – that is, a condition that is initial and basic, grasped in the mythologem of the Golden Age. Modernity brought a new notion of the state of nature: *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the war of all against all. Today the basic model of the usual interstate political relationship is associated with the idea of the threat. ‘Threat’ is among the most popular concepts of contemporary political vocabulary. It is a kind of borderline status, the status in between peace and war. Defined as such, the threat seems to be an indispensable factor of the existence of humanity. Most modern scholars look at the political reality behind the notion of threat to be specified, described in detail, and labelled according to some classification. Usually, contemporary political scientists, historians, and specialists in international relations or other social sciences tend to consider facts and avoid philosophical metaphysics. The purpose of this chapter lies, on the contrary, in analysing the phenomenon of threat through the lens of interdisciplinary reflection. The analysis is guided by the hypothesis that every external threat is a fundamental cultural conflict marked by the dichotomy of *own/alien*. The slash sign (/) in that case symbolizes the threat. Behind all political, ideological, or military threats lies the primary ethnic antagonism of *own* and *alien*. The former is seen as orderly and composed, while the latter seems chaotic. Every ethnos in different periods of its history can pose threats to other peoples – that is, it can have a tendency towards expansion and to exist at the cost of appropriation of the alien. There is also an opposing tendency, where ethnos resists the external threat and protects its *own*. In both cases one can observe instances of structuring of the *own/alien* opposition. This text is not only going to problematize the concept of threat, but also, using the case of Pan-Slavism ideology, to show how the dilemma of friend/foe can be transferred to another classical dilemma of the political – the dilemma of master/slave.

On the Etymology of the ‘Threat’ Concept

Every national language (‘the house of Being,’ according to Martin Heidegger) entails the possibility of interpretation of the concepts that are routinely used as scientific categories. In the Russian language, the word ‘threat’ (*ugroza*) means ‘*ugroza*’ – ‘coming thunderstorm’ literally, and ‘disaster’ metaphorically. Thus, in Russian, the word ‘threat’ means that a disaster, a storm, a terror is about to happen; its coming is inevitable. Relatedly, one of the meanings of threat in English is to indicate something impending: “the sky held a threat of rain.”¹ The storm is a universal metaphor as much as the threat is a universal concept. In the Russian Lexicon by Vladimir Dal’, the word *ugrazhivat’*, or *ugrozhat’*, that is, to pose a threat, to threaten someone, means ‘to hold someone in fear,’ ‘under a threat.’² The threat is something that allows holding both a singular human being, and a society, in the state of fear. Both the (external) threat and the (internal) fear are united by the destroyed communication between the consciousness and the world.

In Christian doctrine, the metaphor of the storm symbolizes the infinite might of God and, simultaneously, the human being’s fear of God. God has absolute power and represents therefore a threat. The entire body of the Old Testament is built on the idea of being threatening, inducing fear, and the inevitability of punishment. ‘Fear of God’ is not a literary metaphor, but a well-working categorical imperative of the Antiquity. Protect your *own* and threaten the *alien!* The Book of Books contains an excellent example of the integration of the *own* based on an ethnic principle. God punishes aliens and betrayers, but He protects His own people. The New Testament, although very different from the Old Testament in many respects, also insists on the complete obedience of the human to God: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”³ The well-known words of Jesus Christ mean that the border between own and alien lies no longer in the ethnic space, but rather in the sphere of religious principles. The sword, by the way, is yet another image that symbolizes the threat. It is not accidental that in Greco-Roman mythologies it has been always associated with lightning – the crucial attribute of God the Thunderer. On the one hand, the sword protects one’s *own* (friends); on the other hand, it serves as a constant reminder of retribution to the *aliens* (foes, enemies).

1 “Threat,” in Merriam-Webster.com, <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/threat>>. Accessed 30 April 2017.

2 Vladimir Dal, *Tolkovyj slovar’* (The Dictionary), vol. 1 (Moscow, 1994), p. 980.

3 Matt. 10: 34.

On the 'Threat' as a Reflection of the Political

Greco-Roman civilization formed the scientific principles that acquired hegemony in the later history of the European civilization. Aristotle formulates two fundamental oppositions in defining politics: friend/foe in *Nicomachean Ethics*, and master/slave in *Politics*. For Aristotle, friendliness (*philia*) binds together not only people, but also states.⁴ In contemporary scientific lexica, the verb has the same meaning, pointing to the function of communication. Only the own interact, befriend each other, communicate.

The internal structure of the state is based on the citizens' mutual utility. The latter is defined as pleasure for oneself. In the external world, states befriend each other, also based on 'considerations of utility.'⁵ According to the philosopher, the relationship between the master and the slave is also determined by 'friendliness.' "Since [...] the slave is a part of the master – he is, as it were, a part of the body, alive but yet separated from it."⁶ Aristotle's discussion of the opposite is rather cursory. He does not consider enmity as a natural state. However, in such an idyllic worldview, there are specific threats. An internal threat is a threat for a human being to go beyond the borders of the *polis*, the fear of a *zoon politikon* to find itself out of the crowd of his own species. The external threat comes from the barbarians. It is quite indicative that Aristotle equates barbarians with slaves. Conquest is a violent appropriation of the alien. The alien is seen by the Greek philosopher as an inanimate object. A barbarian is either an enemy already conquered – that is, de facto, a slave – or an enemy to be conquered in the future – a would-be-slave. Concerning the state security as a form of resistance to the external threat, Aristotle directly points to the fact that the state "must not only be prepared to protect itself, but also to induce fear in and be able to help some of its neighbours both on the land and at sea."⁷ To 'induce fear' means to threaten the *alien*, at the same time helping one's *own*.

Let's make a brief comparison of the two models of threat in the Judaic and Greco-Roman cultures. If one takes the famous conception of Challenge-Response, proposed by Arnold Toynbee,⁸ it becomes possible to equate the threat with the challenge. The response to the threat transforms the potential plan (reciprocal threat) of the response into the real one (direct clash of opposing forces). Two such universal responses are fear and expansion. Clearly,

4 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, transl. W.D. Ross (Kitchener, 1999), 1155a, pp. 20-25.

5 *Ibid.*, 1157a, 25-30.

6 Aristotle, *Politics*, transl. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, Indiana, 2017), 1255b, 10-15.

7 *Ibid.*, 1327a.

8 Toynbee, Arnold J., *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I-VI* (London, 1947).

the Judaic model (especially if considered according to the Old Testament) is much more intensive and repressive than the one from the Greco-Roman cultures. Aristotle's worldview is much more static and harmonious, and in its later Roman version, one can find an approval of Aristotle's idea of the transformation of a slave into a friend. The slave becomes a servant – *servi* (in Latin): “This name was given by the Romans to their slaves; they were so called from *servare*, to preserve, from the ancient practice of the generals of the army, who were accustomed to sell their captives, and preserved them rather than kill them.”⁹

At the moment when the Judaic culture closed within its ethnos, the Roman and Christian cultures expanded and acquired a supra-ethnic and supra-state character. The Christian culture demonstrated a transition to the status of a world religion that knows no distinction between *own* and *alien*, neither Helene nor Jew. Or at least it is declared like that.

In modernity, a new universal subject of the threat was formed that acquired the name of Leviathan. This is nothing else than a state, but its image is a direct opposite to Aristotle's. In Hobbes's work,¹⁰ Leviathan, similarly to the Golem in Judaic mythology, is an ‘artificial man,’ whose mission is to protect and guard the ‘natural man,’ that is, everyone who belongs to the commonwealth. The war for Hobbes is the threat. Thus, he writes:

Hereby it is manifest that, during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man. For ‘war’ consisteth not in battle only or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known, and therefore the notion of ‘time’ is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower or two of rain but in an inclination thereto of many days together, so the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting but in the known disposition thereto during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is ‘peace.’¹¹

In other words, the hostile is always *alien*. A human being can find rescue from the threat only within his *own* space, which Hobbes calls Leviathan, or the

9 “*Servi*,” in The Law.com Dictionary, <<https://dictionary.thelaw.com/servi/>>. Accessed 30 April 2017.

10 See also Ionut Untea's chapter in this volume.

11 Thomas Hobbes, *Of Man, Being the First Part of Leviathan*, vol. xxxiv, part 5. The Harvard Classics (New York, 1909-1914).

state. It is important that the English thinker considered “the ability to induce fear” among the “virtues of the state of nature.”¹² In such a philosophy we find a direct apology of the threat. The *homo politicus* always exists within a threat. The threat is a state of nature for the ‘social animal,’ and in that sense it expresses the essence of the political.

On Sovereignty and Sphere of Influence as Reactions to External Threats

The metamorphoses of *own/alien* in history can be seen in historical maps that represent the changing borders of states. There is a well-known quote from Winston Churchill: “Great Britain has no constant friends or enemies but rather constant interests.” The notion of ‘interest’ is treated as being oriented at some kind of objective reality, as a realization of objectively meaningful goals and primary incentives for activity. The etymology of the word ‘interest’ goes back to the Latin *inter esse*, which means ‘to be in between.’ One might recall that a threat is also something that always lies in between a war (as in Hobbes) and a fight. It is state of a struggle with the enemy that is both within and outside. The state – large or small – always exists between internal and external threats. The threat can emanate from the internal, as well as the external *alien*. Both internal and external *aliens* are called enemies, while the *own* is called a friend. The *own* is always identified as a friend, while the *alien* always appears as an enemy.

The foreign policy of modernity was a policy of permanently changing alliances and coalitions. Friends became enemies and vice versa. The self-consciousness of this epoch began with the concept of sovereignty and ended with the notion of the spheres of influence. The former concept emerged in the second half of the 16th century, the latter around 1880-1885. Sovereignty establishes the borders of the state that separate the *own* from the *alien*. The conventional definition of this concept runs as follows: “Sovereignty [...] is understood [...] as the full right and power of a governing body to govern *itself* without any interference from *outside* sources or bodies.”¹³

The concept of ‘spheres of influence,’ on the contrary, justifies the state’s ability to go beyond the borders of its *own* space and appropriate the *alien*. The

12 Heinrich Meier, *Karl Schmitt, Leo Strauss i ‘Ponyatie politicheskogo.’ O dialoge otsutstvuyushikh* [Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and the Concept of the Political. The Hidden Dialogue] (Moscow, 2012, orig. in German 1988), p. 129.

13 Everett C. Borders Jr. *Religion, Thesis: A Vile Desecration of the Ancient Ones the Cause & Effect of the Birthplace of Racism* (s.l., 2017). Italics by the author.

19th century gives numerous examples of how the world has changed. Great Powers considered the dependant *alien* cultures as the part of their own spheres of influence. Examples include an Anglosphere, a Francophone sphere, a Germanosphere, a Turkosphere, a Slavicsphere, or a Hispanophone sphere.

The author calls the politics of establishment of one's own sphere of influence a *supra-state sovereignization*.¹⁴ Up to now, this interpretation, as well as the term itself, had no place in political theory. The reason is obviously in the paradoxical character of a juxtaposition of these two words. Usually the notion of sovereignty and the notion of 'supra-state structures' are treated as mutually-exclusive alternatives. Supra-state structures delimit sovereignty, as is the case in today's Europe. In this chapter, we are concerned only with the 19th century as a period of ideological preparation of the wars, revolutions, coups, and social cataclysms to follow. At the start of a possible model of supra-state sovereignization, one country begins to present itself as the centre of cultural, economic, and immediate political influence. After that, it establishes a strict distinction between its *own* and the *alien*, pushing this imaginary line far beyond de jure existing state borders. The zone of influence is the *alien* represented as *own*. In practice, this means a broadening of the zone of state sovereignty beyond the borders of this state. Diverse issues are invoked as official arguments in support of this cause, ranging from common values, language, or cultural forms of commonality, to historical precedents, etc. Understandably, other countries – both those who unwillingly find themselves within such a sphere of influence and those who would like to add these territories into their own control zone – perceive such policy of supra-state sovereignization as a threat to both their own security and their interests.

In the political vocabulary of the end of the 19th century, such a policy was called 'imperialistic.' In today's scientific discourse, the term is usually either avoided or mentioned with absolutely negative connotations. In the author's view, the real shortcoming of this concept lies in its connection to the term 'empire,' which is too rigid. The sphere of influence does not emerge as exclusively imperial intention. Rather, the initial impulse is given by the ethnos that finds itself within an alien culture. However, empires serve as the poles of attraction for these ethnic groups. Every player in this political game is concerned with his own tasks. While empires threaten other empires, small ethnic groups appeal to them for protection, seeking a possibility for national and

14 Vladimir Belous, "1914: Etno-kulturnaja opozicija 'svojo/chuzhoe' kak impuls i lejtmotiv voennoj konfrontacii" (1914: Ethno-cultural opposition "own/alien" as an impetus and leitmotif of war confrontation), *Politicheskaja Ekspertiza: POLITEKS* 10, no. 2 (2014), 54-60.

state-based self-determination. In other words, empires form another element of the threat that is always ready to be moved from the internal plane to the external one. The policy of supra-state sovereignization, even though empires are not its primary subjects, can also be called ‘imperialistic.’

On Pan-Slavism as an Ideological Basis for Protection from External Threats

This chapter will demonstrate the nature of supra-state sovereignization politics by considering the case of Pan-Slavism. Pan-Slavism is treated here as an idea of Slavic *identity* that is gradually transformed into a political *ideology* and further becomes political *practice*. The idea of the unification of the Slavic peoples emerged around the beginning of the 17th century and achieved a peak of popularity in the 19th century. In this historical period, the idea acquired the status of an ideological norm that aimed at becoming the main factor of the formation of a new supra-ethnic community in Europe – the so called ‘Slavic world.’

There are some very specific political goals behind this ideological norm. Ideology is always a field of imaginary communication, or “false consciousness” (Karl Marx), whereby a part pretends to be the whole and the whole is replaced by the part. One of the most important functions of ideology is the definition of the enemy. Having an enemy in the broadest sense can be called a threat. Ideology itself threatens the *alien*, and, on the other hand, it formulates the threats *for itself*. Political ideologies are oriented towards the authorities and therefore always set themselves such goals that involve the practical fulfilment of their ideas.

Ideology develops through at least two stages. In the first stage, it belongs to a limited circle of the few, or ‘idealists.’ In this stage, ideology is usually the product of literary exercises and discussions, which structure it and from which it acquires its audience and followers. In the second stage, ideology becomes a political doctrine which then becomes a guide for action. Historical experience shows that the realization of the ideology leads not only to the defeat of its adepts, but also to the destruction of the very foundations of the statehood (the Russian Empire is an obvious example). This aspect, however, is beyond the temporal framework of the present work (it concerns the 20th century). Research on Pan-Slavism also distinguishes these two stages in its development: ‘emancipatory’ and ‘chauvinist.’ Whereas the former was oriented exclusively at the “cultural rapprochement of different Slavic people provided their national peculiarities to be safe and secure,” the latter was based on

“political domination of Russia over the Slavic peoples”¹⁵ and served as a mediator of the “aggressive Russian policy regarding the Slavic question.”¹⁶

Pan-Slavism, a movement which crystallized in the mid-19th century, is the political ideology concerned with the advancement of integrity and unity for the Slavic peoples. Its main impact occurred in the Balkans, where non-Slavic empires – the Byzantine Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and even the Republic of Venice – had ruled the South Slavs for centuries. The supporters of Pan-Slavism in today’s Czech Republic, Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia, and the other Slavic peoples of Europe, considered the Russian Empire as a ‘friend,’ defender of the common interests of the Slavic community, or the Slavic world. For the Slavic peoples of Europe, Pan-Slavism reflected not only their gravitation towards Russia, but also their own will to achieve national and state independence. Pan-Slavism at that stage was mostly an ideology of national awakening and liberation, an ideology of Slavic solidarity. It is thus quite reasonable that people living within the borders of the other (*alien*) national statehood would gravitate towards a more powerful state connected with them by common ethnic roots and cultural traditions.

However, once this ideology from the literary manifestos is transformed into a political doctrine and starts to function as a guide to political action, its second life begins. In the age of imperialism, the threat for an empire can be only another empire. The internal threat is perceived in this case as a product of an external threat. In that sense, Pan-Slavism functioned as an ideological weapon of the state. The Russian Empire became the political actor with the aim of putting the ideology of Pan-Slavism (the military protection of the Slavs) into practice. The struggle to protect the European Slavs took place between Russia and, paradoxically, Europe. It could be argued that Pan-Slavism was a game of cards, played by the most important political actors of the second half of the 19th century – Russia and Europe.

Both actors played their own games. Europe considered Russia a threat, treating it as barbarian and uncivilized. It is not by accident that from the beginning of the 1870s in the capital cities of Europe, there was a widely spread opinion that Russia, despite speaking of the unification and political empowerment of the ‘Slavic world,’ was in fact more concerned with its own territorial expansion. In Europe at that time, many people were convinced that Russia was a dangerous neighbour, with a “[...] terrifying military mass and, therefore,

15 Vasilij Vodovozov, “Foreword,” in *Pan-Slavism in Past and Present*, ed. Alexandr Pypin (St. Petersburg, 1878), p. IV.

16 *Ibid.*, p. III.

threatening the European progress.¹⁷ Russia, on the other hand, treated Europe (especially the Anglo-Saxon tradition) as a threat to its political foundations. It is from Europe that the 'dangerous' ideas of liberalism, socialism, and revolution came to Russia, threatening to destroy the very basis of Russian statehood. Poland, divided between the two empires of Russia and Austria-Hungary, played a special role in this struggle. It should have been Pan-Slavic. The local ideologists of Pan-Slavism considered the possibility of national unity under such slogan. They thought that if 'Asian' Russia threatened European civilization, Poland could be a barrier against the barbarians from the East, taking the leadership of the so called 'federation of Slavic tribes.' This is the structure of the interstate relationship on a very general level, consisting of mutual threats and fears, the reflection of which happened to be occupied by Pan-Slavism.

Conclusions

It was not the intention of this chapter to tell the whole story of the emergence, rise, apotheosis, and decline of Pan-Slavism, which is a well-researched topic. Instead, it was its aim to prove a quite trivial thesis: that a threat is a systemic feature of politics. A dialectical approach to the antinomy of *own/alien* includes not only the understanding of the unity of the opposites, but also grasping the moment of their mutual transition. This state of transition, which can be called 'enmity,' can also be conceived broadly as the fundamental foundation of both military confrontation and war itself – that is, as a threat. The goal of enmity is to change the boundaries between the own and the alien: *alienation of own and appropriation of alien*. It turned out that there is a direct correlation between the oppositions friend/enemy and master/slave. Not only is the enemy being historically transformed into a slave, and then into a servant, but also the friend being within the sphere of influence can play the role of a servant, or even a slave, at any moment. Thus, the ultimate purpose of enmity is not a total annihilation of the enemy, but a transformation of a friend into a slave. Needless to say, such a formula will never enter the language of public policy. However, within the larger part of politics that is not public, it looks rather well-grounded and evident.

¹⁷ Pypin, *Pan-Slavism in Past and Present*, p. 8.

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