

**Building a Z-Nation?
Ten Years of Historical Statecraft in Putin's Russia (2012-2022)**

Name: Artemii Migavchik

Student Number: 554421

E-mail: amigavchik@outlook.com

Faculty: Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC)

Program: Masters in Global History and International Relations

Date: 26-06-2022

Research Supervisor: Dr. Robbert-Jan Adriaansen

Second Reader: Dr. Iwona Gusc

Preface

This work initially intended to cover the issue of the Great Terror memory in Russia. However, an atrocious and full-scale war, launched by Putin's Russia, left no options for me rather than to focus on the exploitation of the "useful past" in Russia since I believe that the misinterpretations of history have created a massive problem for Ukrainians who are fighting for their freedom, for the Russians who are living under a dictatorship now and for the rest of the world, challenging the post-Cold War global order. Being Ukrainian ethnically but Russian by a citizenship urged me to write about the issues that are extremely dangerous for both of my homelands – the one where I was born, and the one where most of my family and relatives live.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my wife, Polina, who supported me during this challenging and tough year. I am thankful to my parents who have continuously been supporting my strive for education and my dream to become a historian. I am thankful to the Erasmus University – to its staff and to the university itself, a place where I feel myself at home. Thanks to my dear friend and a fellow historian Gleb Golubkov from Central European University, Vienna, for endless nights of discussions over the matter and critique he gave me.

It is impossible not to mention the Ukrainian people and praise their colossal efforts in defending Ukraine and the world that shares the values of democracy, freedom and crucially, values human lives. At the same time, my heart and academic efforts are with those who stand against Putin's war in Russia, who are risking every day and face trials and prosecutions but do not surrender. I devote my thesis to my Ukrainian friends, Ivan from Odessa, and Maria from Kyiv, to the Ukrainian people and to those who stand against war in Russia – either on streets or at home – their combined efforts must not fall out of sight.

Abstract

This thesis looks deeply into the process of historical statecraft in Russia that evolved from domestic use to provision of justification for the current war. A central argument of the thesis is that Putin has continuously been selectively using history for achieving domestic and foreign political goals. He uses three main instruments that allow him to 'weaponize' history, namely: a) intervention in the historical memory and emotional manipulation around the Great Patriotic War, the phenomenon to which I refer to as *pobedobesiye* – the victory cult of the Great Patriotic War;¹ b) the introduction of memory laws and governmental intervention in historical truth; and c) selective interpretations of history by Vladimir Putin. The Russian full-scale war with Ukraine was chosen as a case-study for understanding the way Putin manipulates history for achievement of his own goals, especially consolidation of power. The war culminated from the 8 years long conflict between these countries, starting from the annexation of Crimea in 2014. However, from the historical perspective, Ukraine has always been challenged by the Russian imperialistic attitude towards its sovereignty, which was continuously undermined. The major factor in this war is the development of its official justification, built around Putin's intentional misinterpretation of Russian history and construction of mnemonic bridging between the past and present events. A key finding of the research is that Putin's regime does not intentionally build a profound, defined ideology. Instead, the regime premises on the misinformation tactics that require flexibility and allow the regime to evolve basing on misinterpreted historical past.

Key words: Russia, Ukraine, Putin, historical statecraft, historical memory, memory politics, falsification of history, Russian imperialism, war, *pobedobesiye*, May 9, Great Patriotic War

¹ Soviet and modern Russia's name for their theatre of the Second World War, mostly covers the Soviet defensive war against the Third Reich.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1. Introduction	3
1.2. Research Question	4
1.3. Theoretical Concepts	7
1.4. Literature Review	9
1.4.1. Memory politics and memory laws in Russia	10
1.4.2. Russian nationalism and ideology	12
1.5. Innovative aspects	15
1.6. Sources of research	16
1.7. Methods of research	18
2. Historical Context of Putin’s Historical Statecraft	21
2.1. A Historical Context and the Russian Quest for Identity	21
2.2. The Useable Past: Great Patriotic War Memory as an Instrument of Historical Statecraft	32
2.3 Conclusion	37
3. We Have History at Home: Historical Statecraft in Russia from 2012 to 2021	38
3.1. Law on Foreign Agents as a Non-Trivial Instrument of Historical Statecraft	39
3.2. Government Intervention in Memory in Russia: Legislative Changes (2012-2021)	45
3.3 Conclusion	50
4. Russia’s Weaponization of History: the Russo-Ukrainian War as a Memory War	51
4.1. The Evolution of Putin’s Discourse on the War in Ukraine	52
4.2. Internal “Othering” of Ukraine as a Mean of Russian Historical Statecraft	58
4.3. “We Can Repeat!” Using Great Patriotic War Memory to Justify War Against Ukraine	67
4.4. Conclusion	73

5. Conclusion	75
6. Bibliography	78
6.1. Literature	78
6.2. Sources	83
7. Appendix	92

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

At the grounds of the Economic Forum on 9 June 2022, Putin compared himself with Peter the Great, the first emperor of the Russian Empire: "It would seem that he fought (Peter I - NB) with Sweden, rejected something. Didn't reject anything. **He returned.** (...) The same is true in the western direction, this applies to his first campaigns there. This is what he did. But it seems that **today we are also destined to return and reinforce.** If we would assume that these basic values constitute the core of our existence, we have certainly succeeded in meeting the challenges that lie before us."¹ But why does Putin, a former KGB intelligence agent, compare himself with the founder of the Russian Empire? It would sound weird in any other circumstances but under the current circumstances of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the reference hints at the ideal of the restoration of Russian imperial glory. History thus becomes a weapon in the hands of Putin's regime, allowing Russia to even justify atrocities through the lens of an invented history. This thesis, *Building a Z-Nation? Ten Years of Historical Statecraft in Putin's Russia (2012-2022)*, studies the historical statecraft of the Russian state. In the recent years, the Kremlin and Putin himself have become excessively interested and actively involved in history. History in modern Russia is everywhere: in laws and in the Constitution, in commemorations and is used actively by the Russian government in the ways they need it.

A real change is also seen in the approach of Putin's Russia towards Ukraine. In 2014, Putin started with the annexation of Crimea and installing puppet regimes in Eastern Ukraine. Putin's regime went from historicizing politics to a full-scale invasion of Ukraine – it resulted in the horrible and devastating war between two countries. This thesis will analyze historical statecraft processes in Russia and examine contemporary Russian state discourse towards history and memory while reflecting on the outcomes of such intervention at the example of Russia's war against Ukraine.

¹ "Putin Compared the Current Era With the Times of Peter the Great [Путин Сравнил Нынешнюю Эпоху Со Временами Петра I]," RIA Novosti [РИА Новости] (FSUE INA "Russia Today" [ФГУП МИА "Россия сегодня"], June 14, 2022), <https://ria.ru/20220609/putr-1794337144.html>.

1.2. Research Question

In recent years in Russia, state officials have actively started to intervene in historical memory. For example, in August 2021, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that “the attempts to portrait Stalin as the most notorious villain of the era are part of attacks from abroad, aimed to rewrite the Russian history and review the outcomes of WWII.”² An intricate interconnection between history and politics in Russia is alarming because the state’s degree of interest in history has not always been the same. Today, the country has launched a war in the middle of Europe because of its historicized politics, among many other reasons like the wish of the Russian elites to remain in power and secure their financial flows and the power itself. Its politicians express a myriad of various interpretations of history that necessarily should resonate in the events of today, be it the war against Ukraine or the suppression of the Russian civil society. Organizations like “Memorial” faced a “foreign agent” label and later were forced to close – the same happened with Russian independent media outlets. The main research question of the thesis seeks to include the questions from above and remain sharp and straight-to-the-point: *How did the **historical statecraft of Putin’s regime** evolve from **domestic** to **foreign use** between 2012 and 2022?*

The question relies on a clear timeframe of about ten years: from 2012 to our most recent days. The beginning date of 2012 was chosen deliberately. In December 2011, Russia faced the most prominent street protests during Putin's era.³ People poured out on the streets of Moscow to protest fraudulent parliamentary elections. Protests were suppressed with force, and the protesters found themselves in detention centres, including the opposition leaders like Alexey Navalny, Ilya Yashin, and many others. Such a brute response from the government displayed its fear of losing stability and political influence, ultimately making the Bolotnaya Square protests a trigger for the state to autocratize and halt the democratic transition. In 2012, Putin entered his third term as the President of the Russian Federation. Starting from that point, some memory laws appeared simultaneously with more attention to historical narratives appearing in Putin’s rhetoric. The reasons for that could be seen in both necessity for the regime to reinforce the system that has mostly failed to withstand the 2011-2012 protests and in

² *Vesti*, “Лавров: Попытки Выставить Сталина Главным Злодеем Эпохи – Атака На Итоги Войны [Lavrov: Attempts to Portrait Stalin as the Main Villain of the Epoch Are an Attack on the Results of WWII]”, *Vesti*, 30 August, 2021, <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2606924>.

³ *BBC*, “Russian Election: Biggest Protests since Fall of USSR,” *BBC*, December 10, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16122524>.

Putin's wish to construct a new Russian identity that would prevent a crisis of identity and consequently, any civic unrest that might threaten the regime.

The motivation behind choosing a study of historical statecraft in Russia is that plenty of research studies the connection between war memory and Russian politics. For instance, while Fedor et al. (2017) elaborates on the integration of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War (GPW) into social historical memory, Weiss-Wendt looks at the GPW narratives as the means of consolidation of Putin's power. Kopusov (2018), looking from the legal perspective, studies the use of GPW memory laws to confront opposition activities. On the other hand, Clover (2016), Snyder (2018) and Kuzio (2022) studied the development of the Russian regime through time, taking closer look at the ideological premises of the regime, including those of GPW, and Russian nationalism. However, they focus on separate elements of the same broader picture: Great Patriotic War memory, memory laws and finally, memory wars.⁴ In contrast, this study has chosen to view all the elements combined in order to form an understanding of how history has become a political instrument of the Russian regime.

To answer the research question, I will use three sub-questions to help create a detailed and complete picture of how and why the construction of narratives and meanings has changed in Russia's historical statecraft practices: 1) *How did Putin's vision of history develop throughout his terms?* 2) *Which legislative tools have been used by Russia for historical statecraft domestically since 2012?* 3) *How Russia's historical statecraft influenced the outbreak of the war in Ukraine?* Each sub-question will be answered in a different chapter. I am defining three mnemonic constructions that are represented in the subquestions respectively and are partially answering the questions themselves: *pobedobesiye* (the war craze), memory laws, and selective interpretations of history. This allows me to divide a dissertation into three topics to make the argumentation more essential and coherently structured.

In Chapter II, I will briefly provide a historical context of post-Soviet Russia's development and give an outlook on the "victory craze" in Russia. This chapter intends to bring in the historical and discursive context of the events that happened in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the same time, this chapter includes events that happen before 2011 for a deeper understanding of the evolution of Putin's Russia. A historical context allows the reader to understand the prerequisites for current changes and peculiarities of Russian politics. I argue that starting from 2011, the

⁴ See further: Fedor et al. (2017); Kopusov (2022), etc.

Russian state survived a radical change in the domestic and foreign policy approaches. It could be seen from the active behaviour of the state in the sphere of historical memory. This assumption is based on two premises. First, with the strengthening of Putin's power over the state, Russian government started to master historical narratives, changing from predominantly liberal views of Yeltsin to the current anti-Western and anti-liberal views of Putin's administration. Second, historical memory has become means of Putin's power consolidation through use of memory to change legislature, gain national support and fight opposition. These premises are further considered on the example of the evolvement of the use of Great Patriotic War memory through regime development. Following the premises above, the chapter aims to show the stages of the development of modern Russia and historical events that are relevant to the study of Russia's historical statecraft, particularly those that either related to the historical politics directly or led to the empowering of Putin's regime, providing him with more power.

In Chapter III of my thesis, I analyse the laws, decrees and legislative initiatives on historical memory that were adopted in the period between 2012 and January 2022. Apart from the Constitutional Amendments, I will analyze the amendments to the Federal Law №278-FZ "On Memorialization of the Victory of the Soviet People in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945", 2021 amendments to the Federal Law №121-FZ "On Non-Commercial Organizations", *also known as the* "Law on Foreign Agents" and study the case of the prohibition of the civil rights organization Memorial. This chapter aims to display the influence of the laws and a case, mentioned above, on the historical memory politics in Russia. In addition, I assume that in this period, the Russian government was aiming to consolidate the society and create favourable conditions for Putin to remain in power. The civil rights organization was founded in 1989 and focused on the study of the political repressions in the Soviet Union. On 29 December 2021, Moscow City Court ruled that the organization must be closed, and its international branch should be prohibited in Russia, following the decision of the country's Supreme Court.⁵ This case has been selected due to its high profile and demonstrates how the Russian government uses legislative instrument, designed for other purposes, to silence alternative historical narratives. In addition, the case of "Memorial" is remarkable and vital for studying the Russian government's interference in the domain of historical memory and history itself in its uniqueness: among many other NGOs, the Russian

⁵ "Russia Orders Closure of Human Rights Group Memorial," Deutsche Welle (DW.com), December 28, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-orders-closure-of-human-rights-group-memorial/a-60273615>.

state has chosen exactly the one that concerns the study of history and revelation of previously unknown historical facts like extrajudicial executions in the Soviet times.⁶

Finally, in Chapter IV, I will explain how historical statecraft in Russia externalized from its domestic to international politics and contributed to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2014 and more recent invasion of 2022. The war has brought significant changes to the historical discourse in Russia, requiring a shift from the analysis of the laws and Great Patriotic War cult to the analysis of state propaganda from a variety of sources, primarily the speeches, statements of the Russian officials and affiliated persons with the Russian regime. For Chapter IV, the analysis of the speeches is central, as I believe that the system has hastened its personalization intensively and it is reaching the state of a “mature personalist regime”.⁷ In addition, the chapter is de-facto a case study, in which war in Ukraine is a case and historical statecraft is a central theory that would be used to study the case and the implications of the 2022 Russian invasion in Ukraine.

1.3. Theoretical Concepts

With the choices explained, I will continue explaining the theoretical concepts used in this thesis. Historical statecraft is the first concept of the thesis. An article by Maximilian Mayer, 'China's historical statecraft and the return of history' (2018), introduces this concept to denote the deliberate use of history for political means through connecting domestic discourses to international ones.⁸ In other words, historical statecraft is a process of the editing of historical narratives by the state or a regime, adapting them to the current political needs and extrapolating of the created narratives on other political entities or during the relations with them. Historical statecraft allows the system to be flexible in its policies because the past is no longer a constraint and is a subject to revisions or misinterpretations, while future could be anything. Remarkably, Mayer refers to Benedict Anderson by underlining the importance of the concept 'imagined community' for discovering historical statecraft. China is one of the nations

⁶ “Memorial: Russia's Civil Rights Group Uncovering an Uncomfortable Past,” BBC News (BBC, January 2, 2022), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59853010>.

⁷ Kirill Rogov, “The Regime of Prolongation: Continuismo, Russian Style and The Constructed Majority [Режим Продления: Continuismo По-Российски и Сконструированное Большинство],” in *New (II) Legitimacy: How the Constitution Was Rewritten and What Has It Brought? [Новая (Не)Легитимность: Как Проходило и Что Принесло Переписывание Конституции России?]*, ed. Kirill Rogov, 1st ed. (Moscow: The Liberal Mission Foundation [Фонд "Либеральная Миссия"], 2020), pp. 9-21.

⁸ Maximilian Mayer, “China's Historical Statecraft and the Return of History,” *International Affairs* 94, no. 6 (January 2018): <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy209>, 1222.

that “subject the shape and content of (meta-)narratives of world history to multiple perspectives and a selective process of forgetting and remembering the past.”⁹

Historical statecraft is an intentional politicization of the past with clear domestic and international political aims. It is worth admitting that the concept was influenced by Benedict Anderson's analysis of nations and nationalism.¹⁰ Nations are constructed entities, they are “ahistorical units that progress from the mythical past and march into the bright future.”¹¹ As a result, Mayer claims that “successful historical statecraft produces an amalgam of historical memories that is the product of a selective reading of the past and fabrication of myths based on which that past is extended into the present and structures visions of the future.”¹² According to Mayer, historical statecraft could be defined in three ways: “as the systematic application of representations of the past (real or imagined) to frame and legitimize foreign policy, naturalize a certain image or role of a country, and stabilize collective identities on a national, regional and global level ('communalization').”¹³

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is of great importance for the thesis since the research touches on the question of nation and nationalism. Anderson's work is a notable example of social-constructivist analysis that studies how the imagination shapes the understanding of what a nation is. Anderson sets the following argument: in his view, the nation is an imagined community because it exists in one's mind; the nation is not tangible, nor is it possible to know every person of the nation.¹⁴ Yet the idea of a nation lives in our heads, despite the limitations above. A nation, thus, is an imagined community that is imagined limited, sovereign and is a community. It is limited because there are other imagined communities, sovereign because the power comes from the people (contrary to the king's divine right) and is seen as a community because the nation is knit from the horizontal ties between people that form it.

The concept of historical statecraft is relevant for this thesis, as Vladimir Putin and his regime are trying to do the same with Russia both domestically and internationally. Domestically, history is being rewritten, sealed by a number of memory laws, and reproduced by the state and its adversaries. It allows to review the history, dilute it and finally, export it outside – an example is the evolution of the Great Patriotic

⁹ Ibid., pp. 1222.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 1221

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 1221

¹² Ibid., pp. 1221-1222

¹³ Ibid., p. 1222

¹⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (Verso Books, 2016), 6-7.

War narrative. The victory of USSR in war was pumped up in Russia to the status of the national myth, created values and discourse and now is being employed to intervene in Ukraine, posing it as the fight against the “Neo-Nazis” – just as the grandfathers fought against Nazis. Moreover, the processes in Russia fit Meyer's definition of historical statecraft and its ultimate goals. As in China, the Russian government adopts a particular historical narrative and changes existing. Mayer gives an example of how Putin justified the intervention in Eastern Ukraine by appealing to religion and shared cultural and historical roots during his 2014 Crimea Annexation speech.¹⁵ It is evident that the Russian government is actively using history for political purposes and do not hesitate to shape narratives that are not fitting the current vision of history. One of the examples would be a gradual change of the historical memory on the victory in the Great Patriotic War: from commemoration to celebration, when the feeling of happiness changed mourning and remembrance in Russia. The victory in GPW provided Russia a unique option to nationalize it and make it a “useable past,” helping Putin’s regime to legitimize domestic or foreign policy and eventually, himself as the leader of Russia.

What Putin is trying to do now is to create an imagined community, something apart from the nation of Russia – his devotion to the idea of “the Russian world,” *Russki mir*, exemplifies this statement. Anderson’s theory will be used to see how changing historical narrative influences the formation of a nation-like entity in modern Russia. By referring to memory and past, the times of the Russian Empire and USSR, Putin creates an imagined community, trying to involve the territories belonging to Russian Empire and USSR in the *Russkii mir* definition. Similarly, the involvement of GPW narrative of the division between the “Nazis” and “not” creates a base for national association with the successors of the WWII veterans, creating an imagined community which lives within the memory of the past greatness.

1.4. Literature Review

In the following part, I will first discuss the literature on historical memory politics in Russia. The first part would be devoted to titles that study historical memory in Russia. The literature review contains titles and articles that concern memory politics in Russia and historical memory. The literature is diverse, and it touches different aspects of memory and history politics in Russia, includes the literature on the memory of the Great Patriotic War, nation and nationalism in Russia, Russian and Soviet imperialism and even Russian ideological constructs and their analysis.

¹⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, March 18, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (accessed 20 January 2022).

1.4.1. Memory politics and memory laws in Russia

In their multi-directional research, Fedor et al. analyze how memories of war influence modern politics in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. The Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War in Russia and Belarus of today, is considered a sensitive topic for many people in those countries. The construction of post-Soviet identities created difficulties for the perception of the Great Patriotic War by Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians and a difference of opinions and narratives. Fedor et al. state that memory wars are sparking across and between those three countries - and Donbas is an example. Ideological framing of the Eastern Ukrainian conflict revolves around a dichotomy that Russian propaganda offers portraying the Ukrainian forces as “neo-Nazis” and drawing parallels between the Soviet warriors-liberators and Donbas guerrillas.¹⁶ For the current research, memory politics and historical discourse in Russia are central. Victory in the Great Patriotic War is the central historic event for Russia: the Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War was transplanted into the newly formed Russian state and sacralized by the current regime. This narrative is continuously replicated and has already become integrated into social memory.¹⁷ Fedor et al. provided a thorough and profound analysis of the war memory in three post-Soviet countries. War memories should be considered as the issue that is extensive in Russia specifically, especially despite the pumping up of May 9 as the main holiday in Russia. This thesis is devoted to the study of historical statecraft, of which war memory is a significant part and complements existing academic research on historical memory in Russia and its politicization of the past. What is more, this dissertation reflects on the May 9 commemorations and the perception of victory in the latest times, already after the outbreak of the war. Hence, it will complement the research by Fedor et al, going in line with their discourse on historical memory in Russia specifically.

“Putin’s Russia and the Falsification of History” (2021) is a book of Anton Weiss-Wendt, Norwegian historian who studies Russia and the Soviet Union. The ultimate aim of a book, according to author, is to outline how falsification of history has become an instrument of consolidation of power in Putin’s hands.¹⁸ Weiss-Wendt mentions that the research relies heavily on the digital media of modern Russia, contrary to previously used by him archival-based document research, as he writes about the events in

¹⁶ Julie Fedor et al., *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 4-7.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 43-66.

¹⁸ Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Putin's Russia and the Falsification of History: Reasserting Control over the Past* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 15.

happening.¹⁹ He covers various aspects of historical politics in Russia: geopolitics as a part of falsification of history, core actors, role of the Great Patriotic War, historical education, commemoration, war heroes and the impact of historical politics of Russia on its society. The current dissertation has a number of intersections with Weiss-Wendt's book, the most vital of which is the Great Patriotic War memory. The book is extremely insightful in this topic and provides a crucial logic chain why the Great Patriotic War is being so actively used by Putin: "from one victory, over German Nazism, the native country sailed to another, over Ukrainian "fascism," and that is what cements Russia's status as a superpower."²⁰ It is an important observation as it goes in line with the obsession of the Russian leaders with geopolitics and contributes to the explanation of resonation of the Great Patriotic War-related narratives in the Russian society. This dissertation contributes to the research of Weiss-Wendt by reflecting on the current role of the Great Patriotic War in historical statecraft of Putin after the outbreak of war in Ukraine. The war memory is being used by the regime to mobilize the population against Ukrainians, maintain an overall negative attitude to the Ukrainians as a nation and dehumanizing them through the parallels between them and the Nazis. Hence, the dissertation would follow and broaden the existing discourse on memory politics and history politics in Russia.

The Book of Nikolai Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*, is the next title that touches on the matter of memory laws in Europe, including Russia. Starting from Chapter 5, the Koposov analyzes memory laws in Russia. The aforementioned chapter is devoted to the memory laws in Yeltsin's Russia. Before Putin's era, memory laws in Russia were designed to limit political radicals in Russia, for example, neo-Nazis or separatists. The overall attitude of memory laws was to tame extremism, mostly aimed to defy what extremism is and limit the manifestations of fascism.²¹ To be more precise, the memory laws aimed to protect the vulnerable social groups, such as WWII veterans, and "victimize the Soviet past rather than further developing the Soviet heroic narrative".²² But it is worth admitting that the laws were not passed due to the economic instability in Russia at the end of the 1990s.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 129.

²¹ Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 228.

²² Ibid, p. 229

In Chapter 6, Koposov studies memory laws during Putin's era. He starts by outlining that the country was still undergoing its transition and lacked its own symbols to associate itself with. Russian state started to experiment with the employment of new narratives, with the justification of Stalin as the most efficient one and prioritizing the victory in WWII.²³ Since 2009, new legal projects and drafts that tackle the issue of historical memory considered the newly embraced discourse. There was a need to adopt the laws that would restore the memorial sovereignty of Russia and "defend" it from outside projections and views. Koposov argues that the political crisis of 2011-2012 had only hastened the nationalistic and authoritarian tendencies in the legislature: radical cultural conservatism included a heavy grasp of the state on the matter of historical memory.²⁴

Koposov's research is an example of thorough and all-encompassing research on the matter of memory laws. The author has provided an extensive amount of information on memory laws in Russia during different time periods. However, the work lacks reflection on the 2020 Constitutional amendments and the laws on "foreign agents". The latter is of great significance for this thesis, as it is an example of how the legislature could be flexibly used to impose the state's official discourse without the need for the creation of an exact memory law. This research will provide an example of how a usual law could become a memory law if needed, yet it will not ignore the existing legislature on war memory. The reason for that is the close connection between war memory and historical memory in Russia.

1.4.2. Russian nationalism and ideology

Taras Kuzio's book, *Russian Nationalism, and the Russian-Ukrainian War (2022)* is a very recent secondary source that provides a profound reflection on the Russo-Ukrainian War that started in 2014. Kuzio outlines the particular reasons for the war that are hidden in the imperialist and nationalist stance of Russia vis-à-vis Ukraine and, apparently, most of its neighbours. Kuzio devotes the first chapter to the theoretical perspective and reflected on the differences between civic, ethnic, and civic-ethnic states to bring the categorization first and then, compare Russia and Ukraine. Kuzio's analysis of the Russian nationalism is informative and contains important highlights. For example, Kuzio notes a messianic notion in the concept of the "Russian world" and its

²³ Ibid, pp. 246-247

²⁴ Ibid, p. 279

deep connection with the hostility of the Russian Orthodox Church towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, what ultimately contributes to the overall Russian denial of the existence of the Ukrainian identity and nation as such.²⁵ What this book critically lacks, however, is the reflection on the current events. It was published in January 2022, a month before the war, conveniently providing me an opportunity to fill in the gaps of Kuzio that emerged when the war broke out.

Charles Clover's book, *Black Wind, White Snow* (2016) is another book that should be presented here. I decided to include it in the literature review as the book of Clover contains a very deep and structured analysis of the development of Eurasianist and neo-Eurasianist ideas in Russia. Eurasianism and its recent development, neo-Eurasianism, are not the official ideologies of Russia. Yet they influenced the political elites and key decision-makers, effectively combining with their worldview that premises on the revanchism after the fall of the Soviet Union.²⁶ Clover smartly and deeply reflects on the history of the idea and its path of development, devoting close attention to Alexander Dugin. It is a person who managed to combine various ideas, historically typical for Russia, and wrapped them up in a "philosophy" of neo-Eurasianism. My research argues that there is no ideology in Russia at the current period of time and would bring up the implications of ideology development in Russia, effectively complementing the analysis of Clover.

Following my argument, mentioned in the reflection on Clover's book, a work of Timothy Snyder, "Road to Unfreedom" (2018), opens an interesting point of view on Russia and its politics. From his point of view, Russian politics could be described as the *politics of eternity* – a type of politics, in which there is no end, and the existence is ahistorical because of the eliminations of the facts that comprise history to continue existence.²⁷ In contrast, the West – the US and Europe – experienced the *politics of inevitability*, that has its logical sequence and acknowledges facts. For both concepts, facts are narratives that either ignored in the politics of inevitability or erased in the politics of eternity.²⁸ Snyder argues that the politics of eternity were largely influenced by the Russian fascist thinker, Ivan Ilyin.²⁹ Ilyin developed his philosophy, going in line with the fascist assumptions of the primacy of violence over the law, and believed that

²⁵ Taras Kuzio, *Russian Nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian War Autocracy-Orthodoxy-Nationality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022), 204-221.

²⁶ Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (Yale University Press, 2017), 201.

²⁷ Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (Random House US, 2019), 10-11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

there could be no place for individuality in this world as it dilutes the divine in a human being.³⁰ Finally, Ilyin believed that Russia is destined to cleanse the world and is a bearer of a unique mission of unifying the humanity. Given that Putin is well acquainted with the ideas of Ilyin, the politics of eternity could be a certain framing of Putin's regime on a quasi-ideological level. This book is of great interest for this thesis as I argue that Russia has no recognized or official ideology; nothing complete fits into a typical understanding of the idea. The ideas of Snyder, including his application of the politics of eternity to the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the War in Donbass in 2014-2015 and arguments on misinformation strategy of Putin's regime,³¹ could be expanded by my thesis through the application of the politics of eternity to Putin's historical statecraft.

The literature mentioned above constitutes the core of current research. The literature on the matter is extensive and it is barely possible to include everything in this literature review. I believe that I have included key titles that create an academic debate on the matter and are connected to my dissertation. Fedor et al. write on the memory of WWII in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, ultimately focusing on the political instrumentalization of memory during post-Soviet identity construction. Nikolay Koposov's book provides a detailed picture of how the Russian memory legislation did evolve during different time periods. Anton Weiss-Wendt's book is an example of a historical research with an extensive coverage of the historical politics in Russia. It is devoted to various aspects and elements of Putin's strategy of falsification of the history in Russia, with the Great Patriotic War memory as the key one for a dissertation. Kuzio's book presents a valuable and up-to-date source of information on the state of affairs between Ukraine and Russia. Timothy Snyder provides a great analytical outlook on the implications of the use of history by Putin's regime and attempts to categorize the regime's political vector while displaying how modern Russian statecraft is inspired by the Russian radical thinkers. So does Charles Clover in his "Black Wind, White Snow," where he tells a story of the emergence of Eurasianism and Neo-Eurasianism – an extremely relevant topic for the current thesis due to Eurasianism's possible influence on the Russian decision-makers and hence, on the Russian historical politics. This thesis will aim to relevantly insert itself in the existing academic debate on the matter and contribute to the study of historical memory in Russia.

³⁰ Ibid., 16-30.

³¹ Ibid., 124-128.

1.5. Innovative aspects

The innovative aspect of the thesis is both academic novelty and social importance. I would not want this war ever to happen, but it broke out and apparently, the outbreak of a mass-scale ground war constitutes a significant proportion of the innovation of this dissertation. The Russo-Ukrainian war, the origins of which can be traced back to 2014, has intensified in February 2022 and is a central global event today. The scale of the war, the fact that such a bloody and atrocious war broke out in Europe and the involvement of the UNSC member as the invader in the war make the conflict unprecedented in the recent history. Today, Russia is a major power that acts very aggressively in foreign policy and excessively relies on its perception of history. Manipulations of historical narratives in Putin's Russia is central for the regime to remain in power and to justify the war against Ukraine. History is a weapon of the current war. Establishing a connection between changing historical narratives and the behaviour of Russia opens a way to analyze how the historical statecraft of Putin has contributed to an outbreak of the atrocious war against Ukraine. The current study will contribute to the ongoing research on Russia, historical memory, and memory politics. Understanding the events that are currently happening in Russia and revealing the meanings and narratives of the official state helps to analyze political changes in Russia and explore issues connected with the attempts to change public historical discourse. In addition, it is interesting to explore how the Russia's efforts of the great power status restoration could have caused changes in memory politics. In most cases, earlier studies focus on war memory and current politics. The literature review contains examples of the academic debate in historical memory studies. However, they reflect on the separate bits of a shaky yet somewhat solid process of historical statecraft, which needs further investigation.

Finally, the study highlights how history can be easily manipulated, constructed, and disseminated across the population. Going against the dominant discourses in Russia is now dangerous. For example, as a person who studies history and a citizen of Russia, I might find myself in jeopardy at home because of the memory laws that promote a particular view on history and excessive politicization of history as a science by Putin and loyal law enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, it is impossible to keep silent while my family members are being shelled and hide in bomb shelters in Ukraine or seek asylum in the EU. It is impossible to keep silent when my country does atrocious things. By writing this thesis, I intend to contribute to the study of Putin's

regime and in that way support Ukraine, the country I love and with which I have a deep connection.

1.6. Sources of research

Primary sources contain first-hand information on the research topic and are of particular interest for the current work. The study will use primary sources such as laws and law projects, government documents, presidential decrees, speeches transcripts and in some cases, photographs.

For Chapter II, academic literature on history of modern Russia as well as articles from different media sources (Meduza, Kommersant, Lenta.RU, etc.) are used to introduce the reader to the topic of Putin's regime development. Various academic literature, media articles and websites (e.g., pobedobesie.info, articles on <https://carnegie.ru>, etc.) also help to elaborate on the concept of 'war cult' or *pobedobesie* and its evolution through modern Russia history. An advantage of these primary sources is that they are up-to-date and allow to assess the current events from different perspectives, including the one of the Russian state. A disadvantage comes hand in hand with the advantage: while using state-affiliated media, one should carefully assess the contents and use this primary source considering its relation to the Russian government.

Laws and law projects pose an interest for this thesis, namely for Chapter III, where I seek for connection between historical discourses and legislature. They provide outlooks of how the official historical discourse of Russia shifts, particularly prior to the start of the war when Russia's politics of history was less explicitly vented, but omnipresent in legislation. I specifically focus on two laws: the Federal Law of 20 July 2012 №121-FZ "On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent," also known as the "foreign agents' law" and the 2020 Amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Both laws could be found in Russian language in *Гарант* (lit. guarantee) law database (<https://base.garant.ru>) or at the *Official Website of the Legislative Information of the Russian Federation* (<https://publication.pravo.gov>).³² A downside of this type of primary source is the fact that the sources are primarily in Russian. The Russian language has distinct

³² <https://base.garant.ru/70204242/>

peculiarities in translation to foreign languages, especially English. All the translations have been done carefully to save the initial meaning and narrative.

Government documents and presidential decrees are other types of primary sources. Lamont calls this type of source a “primary document source”.³³ They may reflect the position of the state towards historical memory through the description of intentions, actions and measures taken in domain of historical memory or contain discursive elements, needed for the research. New laws and the latest presidential decrees are available at <https://regulation.gov.ru> (available in Russian only) and <https://kremlin.ru> (available both in Russian and English). This source would be used throughout the paper without an attachment to a certain chapter. The weak sides of these primary sources are that documents might generally be hard to access, but this is not the case in the current research: the documents I need are open access.

Finally, speeches and the rhetoric itself the most valuable primary sources for the current thesis. Speeches would mostly be used in Chapter II and Chapter IV. In Chapter IV, Putin’s 2022 war speech is analyzed with the help of a discourse analysis research method. Speeches present personal positions of officials with their opinions and consequently, present a broader picture of the politicization of history in Russia. Speeches provide a deeper understanding of how the personality of certain officials reflects in the actions taken by the state. Most speeches are accessible through the official website of the Russian government, <http://en.kremlin.ru>. In other cases, I use Russian media outlets, both prohibited by the Russian state (e.g. <https://medusa.io>, <https://dw.com>, <https://novayagazeta.ru>) and state-sponsored (e.g. <https://ria.ru>, <https://kommersant.ru>, <https://rbc.ru>, . Even though speeches are vital for the research, they also have several disadvantages. Apart from translation issues, speeches of Russian officials are not always emotionally charged and may be blank and nominal, without any value for the research. What is more, Nelson (2021, xi) claimed that the speeches of the Russian officials, including Putin and Medvedev, display persistent duality and do not reflect any position.³⁴ Even though I will take his remark into account, I still believe that the speeches are the most valuable source of analysis for this dissertation as they demonstrate the evolution of the Russian historical discourse.

³³ Lamont, Christopher. *Research Methods in International Relations*. 1st ed. London: SAGE Publications, 2015, 80-81

³⁴ Todd H. Nelson, *Bringing Stalin Back in: Memory Politics and the Creation of a Useable Past in Putin's Russia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), xi.

1.7. Methods of research

Methodology-wise, the research will be based on qualitative research methods. I would call the method I am using as the *methodological triangulation*. These are *modus operandi*, discourse analysis and case-study.

The primary method of the thesis is historical *modus operandi*. It is a cause-effect analysis of historical events that includes the analysis of the events, their development, and the outcomes they produce. *Modus operandi* “refers to the identification of the cause of a certain effect by means of a detailed analysis of the preceding chain of events and the ambient conditions of those events.”³⁵ This method is typical for research in history, nevertheless, it has proven its reliability and is logically applicable to the topic of a thesis. Analyzing historical events and identifying causal connections between them are core reasons why this method is going to be used. This method could be traced in the entire paper; however, *modus operandi* is predominantly used in Chapter II that devoted to the history of modern Russia and the analysis of the Russian “cult of victory.”

The next method is discourse analysis. Since discourse analysis is a considerably broad research tradition, I need to specify from the very beginning that I consider critical discourse analysis as the primary method for this research. Teun Van Dijk argues that there is no such research method as a discourse analysis; instead, discourse studies or critical discourse studies use different methods of research that fit in the current situation.³⁶ Critical discourse studies focus on the relations between social structure and discourse structure: how the discourses differ and shape the social structure.³⁷ The best option to answer the research question is to establish a connection between changing historical narrative and politics by analyzing the discourse. Critical discourse studies also focus on the dominant-subordinate relations reflected in the discourse. The discourse analysis is done both through reading with the grain, i.e., searching for the main idea of the author, dominant discourse, identity, and contexts that surround the speech, and against the grain, i.e., through alternative interpretation of the text within the context studied.³⁸ Reading against the grain implies that the

³⁵ Sandra Mathison, “Modus Operandi,” *Encyclopedia of Evaluation*, January 1, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950558.n347>, 378.

³⁶ Van Dijk, Teun A., “Critical Discourse Analysis,” in *Discourse and Power* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2-3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ Mary Rizzo, “Reading against the Grain, Finding the Voices of the Detained,” *Museums & Social Issues* 12, no. 1 (March 2, 2017): pp. 26-32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15596893.2017.1289779>, 28.

discourse analysis would be conducted primarily to reveal the meanings that contradict what was said or written.

Van Dijk's article, 'Ideological Discourse Analysis' (1995), displays the connection between ideology and discourse. He studies the structures of ideologies and structures of meaning in this work and the strategies employed to influence the discourse. This article is useful for this study because it explains how ideologies reflect the us-them dichotomy. The key finding of an article was that most ideologies use this same dichotomy, "positive self-representation and negative other presentation."³⁹ Russian official discourse uses the us-them dichotomous division actively, for example, through creating labelling of the 'Nazis' for those who spread a different from the official point of view. Russian rhetoric towards the defenders of Ukraine is currently the most evident example of how the 'us-them' dichotomy is used in the official and historical discourse in Russia.

Being more specific, a discourse analysis will be conducted partly as archival and document-based research. When it comes to studying the state and its actions, it is impossible to ignore official statements, laws and decrees, and speeches of Russian officials. This method forms the backbone of the research and provides an outlook on the official position. Lamont outlines that official documents give a comprehensive perspective on the state and its actions.⁴⁰ At the same time, speeches of the governmental officials and articles from the state-controlled media present a particular interest for the thesis. They might reflect the change of the historical discourse in Russia; hence they must be considered an object of research. Archival and document-based research, however, is a double-edged sword. Since it involves work with materials published in a different language from the one used in the research, translations and interpretations should be made especially carefully.

Finally, a case study. This method is known for its flexibility and is widely used in social sciences. In essence, a case study is a research method that presents itself "an intensive study of a single case or a small number of cases which draws on observational data and promises to shed light on a larger population of cases."⁴¹ A particular feature of this research method is that it puts a single observable case in the

³⁹ Van Dijk, Teun A. "Ideological discourse analysis." In *In*. 1995, 126-127

⁴⁰ Lamont, Christopher. *Research Methods in International Relations*. 1st ed. London: SAGE Publications, 2015, 80-81

⁴¹ John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 28.

center to create a foundation for the analysis of other related or similar cases. In other words, case study allows to create a certain type of “precedent” on which the analysis would develop and be applicable to other cases that are similar. Yet it is worth underlining that a case study should preferably focus on a single observable case first.⁴² In the case of this dissertation, a case study would focus on the analysis of the war in Ukraine. The war itself is the case that would be analyzed through the different aspects that, in my opinion, constitute the case: Putin’s war discourse, “othering” of Ukraine in the Russian discourse and the use of the war memory in relation to the war in Ukraine. If combined, it is the case of the “spillover” of Putin’s historical statecraft abroad.

⁴² Ibid., 30.

2. Historical Context of Putin's Historical Statecraft

“First of all, it is good to recognize that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century. For Russian people, it turned out to be a real drama. Tens of millions of our compatriots found themselves on the outer side of the Russian territory.”¹

- Vladimir Putin in his Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, 25 April 2005.

On the 25th of April 2005, in his second term as president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin referred in his Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly for the first time to the collapse of the Soviet Union as the largest geopolitical catastrophe for Russia in the twentieth century. He saw it as a tragedy: his country has fallen apart while he already has been a mature man who worked in the governmental security agency. As a president, Putin has been expressing respect to the Soviet Union initially indirectly, however, over the time, his passion with the Soviet times only grew. This passion has reflected on the statecraft of modern Russia, what would be displayed in Chapter II.

This chapter will investigate the origins and development of historical statecraft and the politics of history by the Russian government since 2012. It aims to answer the question *How did Putin's vision of history develop throughout his terms?* I will answer this question by providing a historical context for the evolution of the historical politics in Russia and exemplify it by the analysis of the “cult of victory” in Russia.

2.1. A Historical Context and the Russian Quest for Identity

Russia, officially the Russian Federation, is nominally a super-presidential democratic republic with a federal administrative division. Super-presidentialism is described as a system in which executive branch of government is significantly over-powered than legislative or judicial one.² The country emerged as the successor of the Soviet Union which collapsed in December 1991. The collapse of the USSR was a

¹ Putin, Vladimir. “Message to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.” President of Russia. April 25, 2005. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>

² Clark, William A. “Presidential Power and Democratic Stability under the Russian Constitution: A Comparative Analysis.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1998): 620–37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551905>.

complicated process that went quite difficult. Alongside other 14 former Soviet republics, Russia started to implement democratic reforms, launched by its first president, Boris Yeltsin, in the 1990s. Russia held its first democratic elections in 1996, and, as a result, Yeltsin won against Gennadii Zyuganov, the head of the Communist Party of Russia. It can be said that in the 1990s, the country launched its democratic transition. At the same time, Russia adopted a rather peaceful foreign policy approach, trying to improve relations with the West and remain in stable and peaceful relations with the post-Soviet countries.

The newly formed nation faced an issue with the formation of a new identity. Shevel argues that this issue is extremely complicated because of the history of Russia's development: having been an empire for a long time and having survived a revolution, Russia had a supranational identity rather than a national one.³ Furthermore, the ethnic and cultural diversity of Russian inhabitants created a considerable obstacle to the process. Two wars in Chechnya and a 1992 secession referendum in Tatarstan are prominent examples of how the processes of ethnic self-identification complicated the creation of unifying Russian identity. The 1990s in Russia were considered a liberal Westernist turn in terms of identity, characterized by domestic political liberalization and an intellectual revival of the Westernist tradition (*западничество*) that opposed the Slavophilia (*славянофилия*) in nineteenth-century Russia.⁴ In accordance with this tradition, the socialist revolution in Russia has excluded it from the Western civilization, and Russia's true identity was deprived by the Soviet project.⁵ Slavophilia, in turn, is a directly opposite concept that insisted on the *samost'* (самость, lit. selfness) of the Russians and stood for intellectual and cultural independence from the West. Malinova uses the notion of Anderson in regard to the division between Westernizers and Slavophiles: these are two ways of **imagining** the same nation.⁶ This intellectual dichotomy has been continuously existing in Russian political and philosophical discourse since mid-nineteenth century.⁷

³ Shevel, Oxana. Russian Nation-building from Yel'tsin to Medvedev: Ethnic, Civic or Purposefully Ambiguous? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63:2, 2011. DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2011.547693 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09668136.2011.547693>, 181.

⁴ Tsygankov, Andrei P., *Russia's foreign policy: change and continuity in national identity* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 61.

⁵ *Ibid*, 61.

⁶ Olga Malinova, Creating meanings and traps: competing interpretations of the idea of nation in the debates of Russian Slavophiles and Westernisers in the 1840s, *European Review of History—Revue européenne d'Histoire*, 15:1, 41-54, DOI: 10.1080/13507480701852712

⁷ See further: Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 15-85; James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan, and Mary-Barbara Zeldin, *Russian Philosophy Volume I: The Beginnings of Russian Philosophy, the Slavophiles, the Westernizers*, vol. 1 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1976).

On the last day of 1999, Boris Yeltsin decided to retire. In his address to the nation, he said the famous words: "(...) In the last day of this century, I am resigning. I did everything I could."⁸ His successor was a former KGB lieutenant colonel, Vladimir Putin, who back then was the prime minister of Russia.⁹ A group of oligarchs and Yeltsin's family lobbied for the appointment of Putin as a new president of the country. Putin won the elections in March 2000 against communist Gennadii Zyuganov and liberal candidate Grigori Yavlinskiy. His first term from 2000 to 2004 was characterized as relatively successful mostly because of the growing living standards as a result of growing oil prices. Nevertheless, already in 2000, Putin started to display his affinity with the Soviet Union by changing the lyrics and instrumental song of the national anthem of Russia to the ones of the Soviet anthem, written by the Soviet-Russian composer Mikhalkov.¹⁰

Putin was re-elected in 2004 and served another term as the president of Russia. During his second term, the Russian political system slowly but surely initiated a process of self-identification and mythologization of the Soviet past. First, in 2005, Putin claimed that the fall of the Soviet Union is "the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the twentieth century" during his message to the Federal Assembly of Russia.¹¹ The war memory has become increasingly important for Putin's regime. The victory in the Great Patriotic War has been pumped up as the main achievement of the USSR since the Brezhnev Era (1960s-1980s) that brought the nation a superpower status and glory. Second, the state showed the first signs of its interventions in various spheres. Assassinations of journalists like Anna Politkovskaya¹² or former intelligence service agents like Alexander Litvinenko displayed that Putin has started to use coercive methods against his critics. A notorious case of a large oil company Yukos and charges against Mikhail Khodorkovsky, its owner, resulted in the imprisonment of an *oligarkh* in 2005 and the nationalization of Yukos.¹³ Third, during the second presidential term, Putin started to speak up against the West and the post-Cold War world order. He

⁸ "Yeltsin Resigns; In Boris Yeltsin's Words: 'I Have Made a Decision'". New York Times. January 1, 2000. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/01/world/yeltsin-resigns-in-boris-yeltsin-s-words-i-have-made-a-decision.html>

⁹ Serhii Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom: A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to Vladimir Putin* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 509.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 513.

¹¹ "Putin: Soviet Collapse a 'Genuine Tragedy'," NBCNews.com. NBC Universal News Group, April 25, 2005. <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna7632057>.

¹² "Anna Politkovskaya is Murdered [Убита Анна Политковская]" Lenta.Ru, October 7, 2006. <http://lenta.ru/news/2006/10/07/kill/> (in Russian).

¹³ "Profile: Mikhail Khodorkovsky", BBC News. BBC, December 22, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-12082222>

criticized the leaning toward the West of Ukraine and Georgia. During the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, the “open door policy” of the Alliance was discussed, as several nations aspired to join the alliance. Among these countries was Ukraine: the country applied for the Membership Action Plan that opens the road to joining NATO.¹⁴ In the discussion of the matter between Putin and George W. Bush, Putin expressed his outrage and expressed his doubts on the Ukrainian statehood: “Do you realize, George, that Ukraine – is not even a [sovereign] state! What is Ukraine? A part of its territories is Eastern Europe, and part – a significant one – was **gifted by us!**”¹⁵ Most importantly, in 2007 at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, Putin accused the West and namely the US for the installation of a unipolar world and expressed his concerns about the actions of the NATO alliance in Europe.¹⁶ Munich Speech shows that Putin sees Russia as the successor of the USSR that had lost the Cold War and experiences chronic insecurities in the unipolar world, at the same time being cheated on and played by the West. For example, Richard Sakwa argues that the speech was a prologue of the “neo-revisionist turns” in Russian foreign policy that started in 2012.¹⁷

In 2008, Dmitri Medvedev won the presidential elections, and Vladimir Putin became the prime minister of Russia. Medvedev's term was characterized by Russia's mild rhetoric toward the West and attempts to restart relations with the United States: Medvedev even made a visit to the United States, which is quite a rare occasion for Russian leaders. Medvedev's administration managed to reach an agreement with its American counterparts on the issues of nuclear non-proliferation and combatting global terrorism.¹⁸ Russia aimed to maintain its great power politics, as it was stated in the Foreign Policy Doctrine of 2008.¹⁹ Apparently, Russia supported the UNSC resolution on the intervention of NATO in Libya in 2011. It is an exceptional case since Russia de-facto supported the American “interventionism”, against which Putin spoke out in 2007.

¹⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Bucharest Summit Declaration, Bucharest, April 3, 2008.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm

¹⁵ Olga Allenova, Elena Geda, and Vladimir Novikov (in Russian), “NATO Block Broke into Block Packets, [Блок НАТО Разошелся На Блокпакеты]”, The Kommersant Newspaper #57 (3874) from 07.04.2008 [Газета Коммерсантъ № 57 (3874) от 07.04.2008]. April 6, 2008,

<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/877224> (in Russian).

¹⁶ “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy”, President of Russia, February 10, 2007. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

¹⁷ Richard Sakwa. "Is Putin an Ism?", Russian Politics 5, 3 (2020): 255-282, Doi:

<https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-00503001>

¹⁸ Matthew Rojansky, “Medvedev's Coast to Coast Visit to the United States,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 23, 2010, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2010/06/23/medvedev-s-coast-to-coast-visit-to-united-states-pub-41047>.

¹⁹ Russian Government, “THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION”, Moscow, July 12, 2008. https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf

Was this a fatal contradiction that ended Medvedev's possibility to re-elect in 2012? Apparently not, as the tandemocracy of Putin and Medvedev was a mere instrument for Putin to stay in power without violating the constitutional term limitations.²⁰

This thesis has a timeline that begins in 2012. Being now in the brief context of how Russia met its first years of existence after becoming a sovereign state, I proceed to the events that are considered a turning point in Russian domestic policy that happened in late 2011 and early 2012.²¹

The legislative or parliamentary elections in Russia took place on 4th of December 2011. The United Russia party has won the parliamentary elections with 49.32% of the votes in total.²² Soon, Russian citizens found out that the elections turned out to be fraudulent. Several Russian social scientists and economists claim that the victory of United Russia was evidently fraudulent.²³ The electoral fraud is evident in the so-called "electoral sultanates" - poor regions of Russia with a significant number of the population, dependent on the state or regional budget.²⁴ In the regions like Bashkortostan, a region in the Urals, or North Ossetia, a region in the Northern Caucasus, and in a number of the other regions, ballot stuffing was massive.²⁵ On 9th December 2011, street protests started to attract people of various political views. They were united in opposing the victory of the ruling party, "United Russia".²⁶ The protests were happening in a period from December 2011 until June 2013: they ended with sentencing Alexey Navalny to 5 years prison sentence for a forged accusation of fraud.²⁷ These protests were violently suppressed, and this was a sign of upcoming changes in Russia.

²⁰ Andrei Ryabov. "Tandemocracy in Today's Russia". Russian Analytical Digest, No. 49, November 5, 2008: 2-7. <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD-49.pdf>, 4.

²¹ For example, Maria Lipman, "Dissent, Its Persecutors, and the New Russia," *New Perspectives* 30, no. 1 (January 21, 2021): pp. 6-18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x211066448>, 7, 11-13; Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Putin's Russia and the Falsification of History: Reasserting Control over the Past* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 17.

²² Alex Kireev. "Russia. Legislative Election 2011." *Electoral Geography* 2.0. <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/r/russia/russia-legislative-election-2011.html>

²³ Enikolopov, Ruben, Vasily Korovkin, Maria Petrova, Konstantin Sonin, and Alexei Zakharov. "Field Experiment Estimate of Electoral Fraud in Russian Parliamentary Elections." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 2 (2012): 448–52. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1206770110>

²⁴ Shpilkin, Sergey. "The Math of Elections – 2011 [Математика Выборов – 2011]." *TRV-science*, N 94: 2-4. <http://trv-science.ru/2011/12/matematika-vyborov-2011/> (in Russian).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ "Russia Election: Hundreds Rally against Putin in Moscow." *BBC News*. BBC, December 5, 2011. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16042797>

²⁷ "Russian Protest Leader Alexey Navalny Jailed for Corruption." *BBC News*. BBC, July 18, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23352688>

The Bolotnaya Square protests caused Putin's popularity to plummet. Nevertheless, in March 2012, Putin wins the presidential elections.²⁸ On the day of his inauguration on 6 May 2012, mass protests against Putin's presidency took place.²⁹ Given the violent suppression of the protest in Moscow, the reaction of the Kremlin could be labelled as an outrage. I suppose that this protest, alongside Bolotnaya Square protests, contributed to the all-out launch of Russia's involvement in the realm of national identity construction and mass misuse of history. This protest allegedly insulted Putin, whose irreplaceable press secretary Dmitri Peskov complained in a press statement that the police "was too kind to the protesters today" and called for the prosecution of those in charge of the protest coordination."³⁰ Besides, these protests showed Putin that his power can be questioned by the people, which became a trigger for his quest for construction of national identification of Russia with Putin in power.

One of the main steps of identity creation of modern Russia was the emphasis on the hostility of the West towards Russia and the unacceptance of Western norms and values. In his speech to the Federal Assembly in 2012, Putin put a strong emphasis on commitment to "(...) saving of our national and spiritual identity, not to lose ourselves as a nation. Be and stay Russia."³¹ It goes in line with the concept *Derzhavnost* that forms a foundation of Russia's self-perception. *Derzhavnost* is the vision of Russia as the "derzhava," literally "the power" in the Ancient Slavic and "a sovereign, powerful country" in Russian. Merry explains this concept as "the belief in primacy and greatness of the Russian state raised almost to the level of a secular religion."³² He believes that the current Russian elites consider *Derzhavnost* as the main goal of Russia, to maintain its great power role and to prevent any threats to Russia's sovereignty and statehood – they believe that it happened in the 1990s with the fall of the USSR.³³ *Derzhavnost* is not typical for a certain historical moment of Russia; rather, it is an umbrella term that summarizes the actions of Russia in its various historical forms. For example,

²⁸ Miriam Elder. "Vladimir Putin: 'We have won. Glory to Russia'." The Guardian, March 4, 2012.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/04/vladimir-putin-won-russia>

²⁹ Alissa De Carbonnel, Maria Tsvetkova. "Russian Police Battle Anti-Putin Protesters." Reuters, May 6, 2012. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-protests-idUSBRE8440CK20120506>

³⁰ "Navalny and Udaltsov Detained at 'indefinite festives' [Навальный и Удальцов задержаны на "бессрочных гуляниях"]". BBC News Russia, May 7, 2012. https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2012/05/120507_detention_inauguration_moscow (in Russian).

³¹ "Message from the President to Federal Assembly [Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию]." President of Russia, December 12, 2012. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118>

³² E. Wayne Merry et al., "The Origins of Russia's War in Ukraine: The Clash of Russian and European 'Civilizational Choices' for Ukraine," in *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2016), pp. 27-50, 29.

³³ Ibid.

Derzhavnost is both applicable to the eagerness of the USSR to remain a superpower and modern Russia's aspirations to regain the status of a great power. In addition, *Derzhavnost'* assumes that not all countries are sovereign equally: just some of the states are really sovereign and Russia must be such a state to survive, while the rest of the countries are not sovereign and have one of the *derzhava* behind their back. Following this logic, Russia must dominate countries that are considered as "non-sovereign" by Russia to sustain own status of the great power. The refusal of a country to be dominated by Russia may bring dramatic consequences like war, as it was with Georgia in 2008, for instance. *Derzhavnost* runs as a red thread through the modern history of Russia and is an important part of Putin's historical statecraft. I assume that *Derzhavnost* is the end in itself for Putin's Russia; however, it is not an ideology per se and should not be seen as such. Rather, it is a metanarrative that continuously exists in Russian political and historical discourse.

While Putin returned to power and occupied the Kremlin for the third time, a set of important events happened in Ukraine in 2013. They would change not only Ukraine but also its neighbour, Russia. Growing dissatisfaction with Viktor Yanukovich's kleptocratic regime and Russia's heavy grip over the neighbour resulted in what is called now the Revolution of Dignity, or more commonly: Euromaidan. Yanukovich was a pro-Russian president of Ukraine that started his political career after being appointed a prime minister by Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma in 2002.³⁴ The Revolution of Dignity of 2014 forced Yanukovich to flee Ukraine and seek for asylum in Russia.³⁵ The protests sparked because of a broad dissatisfaction among Ukrainian youth and later, among many Ukrainians, by the corruption of Yanukovich, his political dependency from Russia and by unwillingness to initiate integration of Ukraine in the European Union.³⁶ People gathered on the Square of Independence, *Maidan Nezalezhnos'ti*, and the protests have become a Revolution once Yanukovich ordered a violent suppression of the protest by *Berkut* riot police, resulting in the death of 108 protesters, now known as the *Heavenly Hundred* (*Nebesnaya Sotnya*).³⁷ The Revolution forced Yanukovich to exile, while the power was seized by the interim government before next elections. They

³⁴ "Profile: Ukraine's Ousted President Viktor Yanukovich." BBC News. BBC, February 28, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25182830>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Andrey Kurlov. "Ukraine's Revolution: Making Sense of a Year of Chaos." BBC News. BBC, November 21, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30131108>

³⁷ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Accountability for Killings in Ukraine from January 2014 to May 2016." United Nations Human Rights, July 14, 2016, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/UA/OHCHRThematicReportUkraineJan2014-May2016_EN.pdf, 3.

took place in 2014 and resulted in the victory of Petro Poroshenko, Ukrainian tycoon and a pro-Western politician. These events were a considerable problem for Putin and apparently, for those supporting further integration of Ukraine with Russia, as Ukraine was falling out from the hands of Russia.

In 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, a part of neighbouring Ukraine, a sovereign country since 1991. The earlier mentioned Revolution of Dignity and instability in Ukraine provided Putin with an opportunity to annex Crimea unexpectedly and fast. A “small and victorious war” was planned to eventually revive Putin’s approval ratings by bringing back Crimea, a peninsula, pumped up with associations on the former greatness among Russian officials and “patriots”. What is particularly interesting is that in Russia, nobody calls the events of 2014 and war in Donbas in 2015 a “war.” Putin’s misinformation strategy played a key role in veiling the annexation under the “rebel of the local Russian-speaking population,” as the Peninsula was annexed by the Russian troops without any insignia.³⁸ It was called an “implausible deniability” by Snyder - construction of fictions about the event that was clearly evident to the others any interference in the “essential processes” in Crimea.³⁹ The historical narrative about a long history of the peninsula being under the Russian rule is “legitimizing annexation” and “reverberating widely.”⁴⁰ In Russia, the success of the annexation has resulted in the so-called “Crimean consensus”: a consolidation of society, based on a successful annexation of Crimea that “restored” Russia’s status as a great power.⁴¹ Putin’s approval ratings skyrocketed and the annexation was approved by most Russians.⁴² By annexing Crimea and employing the revisionist position while attempting to regain the great power status, going in line with *Derzhavnost’*, Russia also displayed the identity changes that started in 2012. A civilization discourse was employed by the Russian regime to justify the annexation: for instance, in his speech, dedicated to the annexation, Putin motivated the actions of Russia by protecting ethnic Russians, Russian language and history – the elements of an identity: “Time and time again attempts were made to deprive Russians of their historical memory, even of their

³⁸ Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (Random House US, 2019), 124.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Gwendolyn Sasse, “Revisiting the 2014 Annexation of Crimea,” Carnegie Europe (Carnegie Europe, March 15, 2017), <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/03/15/revisiting-2014-annexation-of-crimea-pub-68423>.

⁴¹ Konstantin Gaaze, “Why Russia’s Crimean Consensus is Over (And What Comes Next).” Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, September 21, 2018. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/77310>

⁴² Katie Stallard, *Dancing on Bones: History and Power in China, Russia and North Korea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 248.

language and to subject them to forced assimilation.”⁴³ The annexation of Crimea and the government discourse that surrounded it is an important marker that Russia’s historical statecraft began to externalize. It is a major event that requires a more detailed elaboration and would be thoroughly analyzed in Chapter IV of this thesis.

The desired stability started to shatter quickly. In March 2017, Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation organized major protests across the country against high-ranking officials’ corruption. The Foundation released an investigation that accuses the president of Russia, Medvedev, of large-scale corruption: it turned out that he possesses property like elite real estate, yachts and even vineyards and acquired all of it while being a government official.⁴⁴ What was particularly peculiar about these protests is that they sparked all across the country: approximately 90 towns and cities of Russia witnessed hundreds and thousands of people protesting.

In the following year, Putin won another presidential election. As it was in 2012, his inauguration was followed by street protests under the motto “He is not our **tsar!**”⁴⁵ In 2018, apart from the protests against the fourth presidential term of Putin, protests against the pension reform took place. The main point of controversy for Russians was raising the retirement age from 60 to 65 for males and from 55 to 60 for women.⁴⁶ Interestingly, during his three presidential terms, he rejected the idea of pension reform: for example, in 2005 and in 2011, he claimed that “(...) while I [Putin] am the President, this decision would not be taken.”⁴⁷ Starting from 2011, his rhetoric evolved and overall, he has been preparing Russians for the reform, referring to the experience of other countries, from France to Ukraine.⁴⁸ At a first glance, this reform does not seem important, by any means – especially for a thesis on historical memory. However, it

⁴³ “Address by President of the Russian Federation.” President of Russia, March 18, 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

⁴⁴ Julia Ioffe, “What Russia’s Latest Protests Mean for Putin.” The Atlantic, March 27, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/03/navalny-protests-russia-putin/520878/>

⁴⁵ “He Is Not Our Tzar,” the Outcomes: One-and-a-Half Thousand Protesters Detained, Record Fines, Secret Trials and One Criminal Case [‘Он Нам Не Царь’, Последствия: Полторы Тысячи Задержанных, Рекордные Штрафы, Тайные Суды и Одно Уголовное Дело (За Якобы Выбитый у Полицейского Зуб)],” Meduza, May 7, 2018, <https://meduza.io/feature/2018/05/07/on-nam-ne-tsar-posledstviya-poltory-tysyachi-zaderzhannyh-rekordnye-shtrafy-taynye-sudy-i-odno-ugolovnoe-delo-za-yakoby-vybityy-u-politseyskogo-zub>

⁴⁶ “Federal Law “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation Concerning the Appointment and Payment for Pensions” [Федеральный Закон “О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации по вопросам значения и выплаты пенсий”].” Russian Federation, October 10, 2018. https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_308156/#dst0 (in Russian)

⁴⁷ “‘While I am the President, this decision would not be taken’ How Putin’s Words about Raising the Retirement Age Have Changed [‘Пока я президент, это решение не будет принято’. Как менялись слова Путина о повышении пенсионного возраста].” Current Time, August 29, 2018. <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/29459254.html> (in Russian)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

carries great symbolical meaning for Russians. Because of the socialistic character of the Soviet rule, Russians see the government as a paternalistic institution that is responsible for the provision of social goods. Pension, or retirement benefits, are important, given the demographic make-up of Russia: it is an ageing country that experienced the so-called “demographic pit”⁴⁹ as an aftermath of WWII and poverty in the 1990s. The reform resonated because the state showed that it will drive further from its social welfare responsibilities, which could have resulted in the de-legitimization of a paternalistic regime by voiding the social contract between state and society.⁵⁰ This could have been a blow to the government’s efforts in glorifying the Soviet past: the Soviet welfare is a significant argument among the elder population in any kitchen debate over the achievements of the USSR. A selective use of the Soviet heritage by the Russian government looks hypocritical: while the victory in the Great Patriotic War is pushed, less evident but important achievements of the Soviets like the welfare system are being ignored.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, which worsened economic recession and created tensions in the society, a Duma deputy from the United Russia party, Valentina Tereshkova, proposed to abolish constitutional limits on assuming the presidency.⁵¹ The amendments themselves were proposed by Putin in his annual Message to the Federal Assembly of Russia in January 2020. Key proposals of Putin were 1) to proclaim the priority of a domestic legislature over an international one, 2) to recognize that Russia is a direct successor of the USSR legally and 3) abolishment of limits on the re-election of the President. Putin mentioned the latter amendment briefly: “I know that there’s a discussion [in Russia] on amending the constitutional article on re-election limits for a presidential candidate. I don’t find this issue crucial, but I agree with it.”⁵² An incentive to amend the constitution was dictated by the “2024 problem” – a need for transfer of power after the fourth term of Putin – and by the wish of the latter to symbolically distance Russia from Yeltsin’s Constitution of 1993 and the liberal reforms of the 1990s. The voting process violated all possible procedural rules of referendum: the state used

⁴⁹ *демографическая яма*, lit. *a demographic pit*, a term used in Russian

⁵⁰ Ellen N. Leafstedt, "Foreign policy fatigue? Russian mass media agenda setting strategies and public opinion on the 2018 pension reforms." *Slovo* 34, no. 1 (2021), 10.

⁵¹ “Tereshkova proposed to reset the presidential term limits of Putin [Терешкова предложила обнулить президентские сроки Путина].” *Vedomosti*, March 10, 2020.

<https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2020/03/10/824795-tereshkova-predlozhila> (in Russian).

⁵² “Address by the President to the Federal Assembly [Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию].” President of Russia, January 15, 2020. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62582>

most of the administrative resources available to it to get as many votes for the amendments as it possible, while the Central Electoral Committee of Russia organized voting elsewhere, for example, on wood stumps or in car trunks.⁵³ The referendum was split into three days ostensibly to follow the coronavirus restrictions. Referendum resulted in the adoption of the amendments with 78% votes for it.⁵⁴

In the last year, two notable events happened: the imprisonment of Alexei Navalny and the closure of the organization “Memorial” in Russia. Alexei Navalny was allegedly poisoned by FSB in 2020 with nerve toxin Novichok and was evacuated to Germany for a medical treatment.⁵⁵ Navalny returned back to Russia voluntarily and was detained by the Russian police at the passport control in Vnukovo airport, Moscow.⁵⁶ Protests in his support were suppressed by the police, with more than 2000 arrests in major cities.⁵⁷ After the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, a prominent Russian politician, in February 2015, Navalny has become the last leader of the street opposition to Kremlin in Russia. The imprisonment of Navalny is evidently connected to the failure of FSB’s assassin team to eliminate the politician. A miraculously survived Navalny who decided to come back to Russia could have become a messianic figure: he survived and was almost revived after poisoning and came back to Russia to continue political activity, a gesture that is admittable at the very least. The prohibition of “Memorial” in Russia is arguably the last important event before the war that ended organization’s long history of opposing Kremlin’s historical discourse. However, the prohibition would be analyzed in Chapter III, as a part of the study of legislative tools of Kremlin’s historical statecraft.

⁵³ “Photos of Russians Voting in Unusual Places Are All over Social Media - Don't Worry Though, It's Legal,” Meduza, June 25, 2020, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/06/25/photos-of-russians-voting-in-unusual-places-are-all-over-social-media-don-t-worry-though-it-s-legal>.

⁵⁴ “Russia’s Putin Wins Referendum on Constitutional Reforms,” Deutsche Welle, July 2, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-putin-wins-referendum-on-constitutional-reforms/a-54018337>.

⁵⁵ “Alexei Navalny Arrives in Germany for Treatment for Suspected Poisoning,” The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, August 22, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/21/alexei-navalny-to-be-flown-to-germany-for-suspected-poisoning-treatment>.

⁵⁶ “Alexei Navalny Detained at Airport on Return to Russia,” The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, January 17, 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/17/alexei-navalny-detained-at-airport-on-return-to-russia>.

⁵⁷ “Russia: Police Detain Thousands in Pro-Navalny Protests,” Human Rights Watch (HRW, January 26, 2021), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/25/russia-police-detain-thousands-pro-navalny-protests>.

2.2. The Useable Past: Great Patriotic War Memory as an Instrument of Historical Statecraft

Navalny was taken in custody by the Russian police in February 2021. Apart from the traditional charges for protests organization and accusations in fraud, Navalny was accused of the “defamation” of the Great Patriotic War veteran, Ignat Artemenko. Navalny called Artemenko a “traitor” on Twitter because the veteran participated in a promo-video rally, supporting the 2020 Constitutional Amendments.¹ Navalny was found guilty in slandering the veteran and was fined by 850,000 roubles.² But why, given the fact that Navalny has already been sentenced for three-and-a-half years in prison, should he be trialed once again for a single Tweet? The reason hides in the perception of the Great Patriotic War domestically, in how has the Russian regime shaped historical memory on the matter and utilizes it. This chapter is devoted to the historical context of historical statecraft in Russia. Even though the Great Patriotic War memory and narratives that surround the event, are not particularly a part of the historical context, they are vital in analyzing the process of historical statecraft in Russia, given the perception of the GPW in Russia, and will be the first domain of historical memory in Russia, analyzed in the current thesis.

Political use of victory in Russia originates in the USSR. The victory in the GPW was first used by Stalin to display it as his personal achievement and indirectly justify the Great Terror and wartime human losses of USSR: for instance, Petrov (2021) provides an example of the Soviet commemorative medals with Stalin’s profile on them.³ After the condemnation of Stalin’s personality cult by Khrushchev in the 1950s, it was the Communist Party that reached the victory – a narrative that intended to legitimize party’s rule.⁴ Soviet Communism emphasized the importance of history, going in line with the Marxist historical materialism: it saw communism as a result of the global economic development that, in turn, moves the history onwards.⁵ As it was mentioned earlier in Chapter II, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was the only post-

¹ “Alexei Navalny Fined for 'Defaming' Russian Veteran,” Deutsche Welle, February 20, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/alexei-navalny-fined-for-defaming-russian-veteran/a-56635101>.

² NB – 850000 RUB equals to approximately 12300 EUR in July 2022.

³ Anton Weiss-Wendt, Nanci Adler, and Nikita Petrov, “The Soviet Past and 1945 Victory Cult as a Civil Religion in Contemporary Russia,” in *The Future of the Soviet Past the Politics of History in Putin's Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2021), pp. 71-88, 78.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Julie Fedor et al., “Political Uses of the Great Patriotic War in Post-Soviet Russia from Yeltsin to Putin,” in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 43-70, 50.

Soviet country that has no clear national identity due to Russia's history as an ever-expanding multi-ethnic and multinational imperial political entity, be it the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire. Russian Empire has already been far away, at least, temporarily from newly created Russia in the 1990s. Contrarily, the history of the Soviet Union was closer to the people, contained a wide variety of achievements like successes in science and space exploration. It has its dark pages too – Holodomor, the Great Terror, Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, forceful Sovietization of Eastern European countries, deportation of many peoples from their regions of origin, just to name a few. The victory, in turn, is a part of the Soviet and Russian history that could be hardly disputed domestically and, in many regards, internationally: USSR was a victim of the ruthless invasion by the Nazi Germany, USSR won the war and destroyed brutal regime, paying an atrocious price of tens of millions of the Soviet people's lives.⁶ What is more, the war touched lives of most of the Soviet families. I am not an exception from the case, three of my great-grandfathers, Ukrainians by origin, fought in the war: one died during the Battle of Dnieper in late 1943, while two of them took part in the final Battle of Berlin. The universal understanding of human suffering and glory that came from the feat of the Soviet people and the symbolic importance of the victory over the Nazi regime are undoubtedly the features that enabled Putin's regime to make victory a "useable past."

Between the USSR and Putin's Russia of today, there were the 1990s, the period that is now almost excluded from the historical discourse in Russia. At first, Boris Yeltsin and his administration tried to distance from the Soviet totalitarian past and put a strong emphasis on democratic values by "humanizing" the Victory Day and making 9 May a commemoration day - they have followed Gorbachev in this regard.⁷ Yeltsin cancelled the parade of 1992, invited foreign veterans and leaders to Moscow. The decision of Yeltsin's administration was largely dictated by the practical needs too: after the fall of the USSR, Russia faced a wide range of economic and social issues and as the military parades are quite costly to run, it was decided to postpone them. They resumed only in 1995, on the 50th anniversary of the Victory,⁸ because it was a unifying element of the Soviet past that could have been practically implemented in post-Soviet Russia to

⁶ Mark Edele. "Fighting Russia's History Wars: Vladimir Putin and the Codification of World War II." *History and Memory* 29, no. 2 (2017): 90–124. <https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.29.2.05>, 8.

⁷ Stephen M. Norris, "Memory for Sale: Victory Day 2010 and Russian Remembrance," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 2011): pp. 201-229, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187633211x589123>, 209.

⁸Afanasiy Sborov, "The Parade With Disruptions [Парад с Перебоями]," *Kommersant* [Коммерсантъ], May 15, 2011, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1638990> (in Russian). NB - News about parades and why Yeltsin refused to continue the Soviet tradition;

bolster the so-needed national unity, torn by the collapse of USSR and hardships of the “dashing 1990s”.⁹

After Putin came into power in 2000, he started to revive the Brezhnev-style victory bravado in Russia. The importance of Victory Day (9th of May) rose significantly. Previously, it was a day of commemoration, the day that the Soviet veterans met with “a happiness with the eyes full of tears.”¹⁰ During the second term of Putin, 9 May gained the status of the main national holiday, as it was the anniversary of the October Revolution in the USSR, and the victory of the USSR was becoming a unifying and glorious event of the common past.¹¹ Putin started to personify the Victory day, adding his family experience to the GPW narrative: in 2004, Putin commemorated the Leningrad Siege victims and delivered a story about his father’s efforts during the war. With the introduction of the Immortal Regiment and its subsequent incorporation in the state-patroned victory “infrastructure,” Putin took part in the march, holding a portrait of his father in Moscow, 2015 (Figure 1).¹² By intertwining the national myth with a personal, family story, Putin blended the contribution of his family with the one of the nation’s together. This feature of Putin’s approach towards victory creates a bond between him and the Russians, reinforcing the image of Putin as the “father of the nation” through such paternalistic notions and incorporation of personal into public.

Today, the victory and May 9 have become *pobedobesiye*. The story of development of the so-called *pobedobesiye* – or, if translated roughly, the victory craze, is a story of transformation of the day of grief and remembrance into a pompous annual event and even a cult, surrounding it. There is no universally accepted definition of the word, hence I will try to conceptualize it. The term originates in the Russian society and its real author is unknown; however, the website pobedobesie.info claims the origin of a word after a theology professor Georgy Mirtofanov from Saint-Petersburg.¹³ In his view, the commemorative events, devoted to the 60th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War in 2005, were the example of *pobedobesiye* because of the unseen after Brezhnev’s era militant message and pomp, with which the day was celebrated in 2005.

⁹ NB – the “dashing 1990s” is a colloquial expression in Russian language that characterizes the 1990s as the time of hardships, poverty, banditism and broad possibilities for some lucky people.

¹⁰ The words from a song “Victory Day” (1975), written after Vladimir Kharitonov’s poem. Is considered as *narodnaya* (народная, lit. people’s song).

¹¹ Julie Fedor et al., “Political Uses of the Great Patriotic War in Post-Soviet Russia from Yeltsin to Putin,” in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 43-70, 50.

¹² David L. Hoffmann and Elizabeth A Wood, “Performing Memory and Its Limits,” in *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), pp. 249-275, 255.

¹³ “Pobedobesiye [Победобесие],” Pobedobesiye [Победобесие], May 8, 2018, <https://pobedobesie.info/> (in Russian).

For example, Tabarovsky defines *pobedobesiye* as “a recent coinage that combines the word “victory” with a word whose root communicates something between “running amok,” “becoming rabid,” and “foaming at the mouth.””¹⁴ Anton Weiss-Wendt provided another definition: “The exploitation of the cult of the Soviet victory in the Second World War has generated a unique term in Russian, *pobedobesiye*, which can be rendered as victory bacchanalia or victory hysteria.”¹⁵

I would define *pobedobesiye* as a combination of warmongering, sacralization and instrumentalization of victory in Russia. Warmongering is exemplified by the annual military parades and speeches of Putin and other officials. A display of Russia’s military might go in hand with the radicalization of Putin’s rhetoric towards the West. For example, on 9 May 2018, he stressed that the memory of the victorious people of the USSR in the West is derogated: “However, attempts are made today to cross out this deed of the people who saved Europe and the world from slavery, from the horrors of the Holocaust, to distort the events of the war, to bury the true heroes in oblivion, to forge, rewrite and corrupt history itself.”¹⁶ Sacralization as a feature of *pobedobesiye* is evident from the use of the words, referring to the holiness or sacredness of the victory by the officials.¹⁷ It is also done by Putin in his 9 May speeches of 2018-2022.¹⁸ Sacralization of the victory is most visible in the Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces in Moscow’s urban area, a monstrous building that combines warmongering and religiosity. There, one fresco depicts Jesus Christ with the sword and the others show the Soviet and Russian military successes, including its recent activities in Syria.¹⁹ Another element of sacralization of the victory is seen when comparing the Immortal Regiment march and Orthodox Christian religious outdoor procession. During the march, people carry the pictures of their family members, fought in the war, to

¹⁴ Isabella Tabarovsky, “Russia’s Lost War,” *Wilson Quarterly*, 2020,

<https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/the-ends-of-history/russias-lost-war>.

¹⁵ Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Putin’s Russia and the Falsification of History: Reasserting Control over the Past* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 151.

¹⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Military Parade on Red Square,” President of Russia (President of Russia, May 9, 2018), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57436>.

¹⁷ “Kremlin Calls the Victory Day ‘Sacred’ for the Russians [В Кремле Назвали День Победы Сакральным Для Россиян],” RIA Novosti [РИА Новости] (FSUE INA “Russia Today” [ФГУП МИА “Россия сегодня”], May 7, 2022); “Putin Calls the Memory on the Great Patriotic War ‘Sacred’ [Путин Назвал Священной Память о Великой Отечественной Войне],” RosBusinessConsulting [РБК], June 22, 2020, <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5ef063369a79478274c786a7> (in Russian). NB - Putin, “GPW memory is sacred” – 2020.

¹⁸ For example: Vladimir Putin, “Military Parade on Red Square,” President of Russia (President of Russia, May 9, 2018), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57436>.

¹⁹ Lena Surzhko Harned, “Holy Wars: How a Cathedral of Guns and Glory Symbolizes Putin’s Russia,” *The Conversation*, June 5, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/holy-wars-how-a-cathedral-of-guns-and-glory-symbolizes-putins-russia-176786>.

commemorate them, the column is sometimes led by Putin in Moscow and by regional politicians outside the capital. During the Orthodox processions, people and priests carry the icons and banners with saints or depiction of their deeds, the processions devoted to religious holidays, to commemoration of martyrs, etc, and the column is led by a high-rank priest or the Patriarch himself. The parallels are visible and sacralization is a part of the current regime's mythmaking. What is more, the movement resembles the processions, held in the Russian Empire, during which the portraits of Tzars were carried in the first lines, along with the icons of the Christ and Saint George. Fedor argues that the Immortal Regiment creates a bridge between the state and the people through the participation of Putin in it and him sharing his family story.²⁰

Finally, the victory is instrumentalized by the regime as a mobilizing and unifying historical event, used by the Russian regime for its political ends especially actively on May 9; for example, a quote from Putin's most recent May 9 speech: "I am addressing our Armed Forces and Donbass militia. You are fighting for **our Motherland**, its future, so that nobody forgets the lessons of World War II, **so that there is no place in the world for torturers, death squads and Nazis.**"²¹ The quote displays a clear dichotomic vision of the world, divided into the Nazis – basically anyone who stands against Russia – and Russia itself as the antifascist core of the world, as modern-day Russia is a successor of the USSR, following the logic of Putin. Crucially, this excerpt from the speech displays how the memory on victory is being utilized by Putin in political means: in this case, to boost morale of the Russian army soldiers who invade Ukraine by creating a mnemonic connection between them and the Red Army soldiers. Another instrumental element of *pobedobesiye* is the St. George's Ribbon, used as a symbol of the victory and May 9. The idea to use St. George's ribbon as the victory symbol is not new: for example, it was used by Stalin's USSR for the Victory commemoration medals as mentioned before. It originated in the Russian Empire and the George's Ribbon was generally attached to the weapons of honour, awarded to the military heroes of the Empire.²² The ribbon was brought back to life as the victory symbol by the Presidential Administration mastermind Sergei Kirienko through the

²⁰ Julie Fedor et al., "Memory, Kinship, and the Mobilization of the Dead: The Russian State and the "Immortal Regiment" Movement," in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 307-338, 313.

²¹ Vladimir Putin, "Victory Parade on Red Square," President of Russia, May 9, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68366>.

²² "St. George's Ribbon." The European Times News, May 11, 2022. <https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/05/st-georges-ribbon>.

student initiative in 2005.²³ The “flash mob” participants gave the ribbons away to people on the streets of Moscow and asked them to pin the ribbon on clothes to make it visible to the others. Today it is being used as the symbol of the support of Russia’s invasion in Ukraine, as it was used earlier in 2014 during the annexation of Crimea. The ribbon serves as the overall symbol of identity of the “winners,” an instrument, developed by the Kremlin for people to show their solidarity not only with the history, but with the Russian state too.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer the question “*How did Putin’s vision of history develop throughout his terms?*” We have seen that throughout his long rule, Russia has becoming more authoritarian, with the starting point of this process in 2012. However, the use of history by Putin and his focus on the matter of historical memory began earlier and could be traced to a start of his second presidential term in 2004. Protests of 2011-2012 have just provided Putin with a profound reason to use history as an instrument of politics and resonated most in the policy of the state in relation to the Great Patriotic War memory. His vision of history developed in line with the development of authoritarian tendencies in Russia, while a focus on the Great Patriotic War memory is explained through practical needs – consolidation of the nation – and his personal affliction with the war memory, what could be supported by his active participation in commemoration events and mentions of his family members’ war stories.

Pobedobesiye has emerged as a result of the nationalization of the victory by Putin’s regime. If combined, the elements serve as a foundation for a cult of victory – or cult of war, depending on the perspective over the matter. Victory has become a certain handmade civil belief, cultivated by the Kremlin to serve as the “social adhesive.” It is handmade because of the mythologization, invented traditions and symbolization and is a civic religion to the extent that it has a massive element of sacralization, warmongery and praise of martyrdom. In Chapter IV, I will connect how *pobedobesiye* supports the justification of the war by Putin’s regime in Russia.

²³ Judy Brown, “Great Patriotic War Memory in Sevastopol: Making Sense of Suffering in the ‘City of Military Glory,’” in *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, ed. Julie Fedor et al. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), pp. 399-427, 408.

3. We Have History at Home: Historical Statecraft in Russia from 2012 to 2021

“I am not intending to change the Constitution under any circumstances.”

– Vladimir Putin, 2005

Putin's promise from 2005 did not stand the test of time as Putin initiated the 2020 national referendum for amending the constitution that resulted in the adoption of the amendments. This chapter will answer the question *Which tools have been used by Russia for historical statecraft domestically and to what purpose?* It will focus specifically on the period 2012-2021 out of three reasons: first, the law on foreign agents emerged in 2012 as a legislative answer on the 2011 Bolotnaya square protests; and second, the use of the law on foreign agents has become especially acute today, after the outbreak of the war; third, the idea to amend the Constitution of the Russian Federation has never been popular and emerged quite recently and was swiftly implemented. In this chapter I will answer this question by first discussing the law on foreign agents and the case of “Memorial” civil rights organization, then will continue with the analysis of the Article 67.1 of the 2020 Constitutional Amendments as an example of the historical statecraft of Russia, reflected in the main legal document of a sovereign country.

3.1. Law on Foreign Agents as a Non-Trivial Instrument of Historical Statecraft

A hidden yet important instrument that regulates historical discourses in Putin's Russia is the so-called 'Law on Foreign Agents', also known as the Federal Law №121-FZ "On Non-Commercial Organizations", adopted in 2012. From the very beginning, I must remark that the law itself contains no discursive elements that reflect the historical statecraft of the Kremlin. Yet it is vital for studying historical discourses in Russia from another perspective: various voices and discourses that oppose Kremlin, are being silenced in accordance with this law. For example, a variety of Russian-based media outlets have been labelled with the 'foreign agents' status.¹ Among them are *Meduza*, *Mediazona* news websites, *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper and even a civil rights organization, *OVD-Info*.² The latter example demonstrates that the law works not only against media, but also against non-profit organizations and, with the latest amendments of the law, against natural persons, regardless of their nationality. All entities have one particular feature in common: in the eyes of the current Russian regime, they were all considered a threat to the stability of a regime exactly because of the alleged 'foreign traces'.³

The law was introduced in 2012 and was initially devoted to the functioning of non-profit organizations in Russia. To be more precise, the law thought to regulate financial flows of NGOs and counteract possible acts of corruption. It is possible to outline two reasons why this law was designed and adopted. The first reason was the wave of the so-called 'colour revolutions' in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. After the 2011 Duma elections, Russians protested massively against falsifications in favour of the ruling party, United Russia. The state apparatus recognized a threat in such protests, bearing in mind the experience of Libya and the execution of Muammar Qaddafi. The initial version of the law on foreign agents focused on NGOs as they were most likely to

¹ Ivan Kolpakov, "Meduza Is a 'Foreign Agent' Now. What's next? Spoiler: We Don't Know," *Meduza*, April 26, 2021, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/04/26/meduza-is-a-foreign-agent-now-what-s-next>.

² "Russia's Justice Ministry Designates OVD-Info and Mediazona as 'Foreign Agents'," *Meduza*, September 29, 2021, <https://meduza.io/en/news/2021/09/29/russia-s-justice-ministry-designates-ovd-info-and-mediazona-as-foreign-agents>.

³ Alexandra V. Orlova, "Foreign Agents, Sovereignty, and Political Pluralism: How the Russian Foreign Agents Law Is Shaping Civil Society," *Penn State Journal of Law and International Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2019): 382-417. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/pensalfaw7&id=391&men_tab=srchresults

get foreign funding for operating activities in Russia.⁴ A second reason for the creation of such a law is the existential security concerns of the state officials. Daucé (2014: 241-245) pointed out that Russian *siloviki*, security agencies, including FSB⁵ claimed that there was a connection between espionage activities and foreign funding of the NGOs like Moscow Helsinki Group.⁶ However, the issue is deeper and lies in the mentality of the Soviet and Russian leadership. Interestingly, the word combination 'foreign agents' throws back to the Soviet times when cooperation with anything 'foreign' was unthinkable and dangerous for any Soviet citizen. There is an assumption, hidden in the word combination, that if a person is a "foreign agent," he or she is a traitor and poses a threat to national security. This "spy mania"⁷ was a usual thing in the Soviet Union. A conspiracy narrative flourished in the Soviet political culture, being especially intense during Stalin's Era: he believed that the Soviet Union is 'encircled with the enemies', and the Soviet citizens believed in the state-pushed message about the foreign-backed spies that are among us.⁸ By using the term "foreign agent," Putin goes in line with Stalin's paranoid obsession with espionage, which is seen by the introduction of the 'law on the foreign agents'. Putin imagined himself the idea of a strong Russia, Russia as a great power that must be consolidated domestically and united to be strong, while opposing Russia and eventually, Putin, is a form of disrespect and even betrayal.⁹ It is a very Tsarist notion that could be traced in the behaviour of the Bolsheviks or the Russian emperors, produced largely because of the authoritarian character of the rule and a "besieged fortress" mentality. Below is the initial version of the law, translated from Russian:

A non-profit organization performing the functions of a foreign agent is a Russian non-profit organization that receives funds and other property from foreign states, their state bodies, international and foreign organizations, foreign citizens, stateless persons or persons authorized by them and (or) from Russian legal entities receiving funds and other property from the

⁴ Françoise Dauce. "The duality of coercion in Russia: cracking down on 'foreign agents'." *Demokratizatsiya* 23, no. 1 (2015): 60-64.

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A401904587/ITOF?u=erasmus&sid=bookmark-ITOF&xid=83af4405>.

⁵ Federal Security Service (Federal'naya Sloezhba Bezopasnosti, Федеральная Служба Безопасности РФ), a secret service of Russia and the main repressive body in the country.

⁶ Françoise Daucé. "The Government and Human Rights Groups in Russia: Civilized Oppression?" *Journal of Civil Society* 10, no.3 (2014): 239-254, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2014.941087>, 241-245.

⁷ Шпиономания, lit. Spy mania.

⁸ Shinar, Chaim. "Conspiracy Narratives in Russian Politics: from Stalin to Putin." *European Review* 26, no. 4 (2018): 648–60. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798718000376>

⁹ *Ibid*, 652.

indicated sources (with the exception of open joint-stock companies with state participation and their subsidiaries) (hereinafter referred to as foreign sources), and which participates, including in the interests of foreign sources, in political activities carried out on the territory Russian Federation.

A non-profit organization, (with the exception of political parties), regardless of the goals and objectives specified in its constituent documents, is recognized as participating in political activities carried out on the territory of the Russian Federation, if it participates (also through financing) in organizing and conducting political actions in order to influence on the adoption of decisions by state bodies aimed at changing their state policy, as well as in shaping public opinion for these purposes.¹⁰

The idea of the law that regulates and paralyses the activity of the opposition was initially in creating legal obstacles to receiving funding, as the funding is considered by the Russian officials as the main marker of the foreign agent, following the logic of the Kremlin.¹¹ The law is straightforward and does not require a thorough discourse analysis. Yet there are two distinct points about the law and its influence on the historical discourse. First, the law explicitly states that a non-commercial organization that participates in political activities and receives funding from abroad is a foreign agent. For instance, the law is actively used against those who study and research history, especially the history of the Great Patriotic War and the Great Terror. Since state occupies a position of a mnemonic hegemon in public history, it wants to save its position and influence the emergence of alternative or challenging discourses. Second, the law is very broad in terms of its understanding, hence, a variety of different organizations could be considered as “foreign agents,” and now it is even possible for a natural person to be a labelled as a “foreign agent.” For example, Russian scholar, political scientist Ekaterina Schulman was labelled as a “foreign agent” for “receiving foreign funding through her salary at Moscow School of Social Sciences and at EchoMoscow (Эхо Москвы) radio station,¹² profits from her books and a donation from

¹⁰ “General Conditions of the Federal Law FZ-121 [Общие Положения: Минюст России],” Ministry of Justice of Russia [Минюст России] (The Government of the Russian Federation, December 14, 2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20131214031909/http://minjust.ru/ru/node/2715> (in Russian).

¹¹ NB: this belief existed among Russians for quite a long time. The logic is simple – people believe that everything could be bought, incl. loyalty, hence those who get foreign funds are foreign agents. An old Russian saying: ‘one who pays orders the songs to be played’ (кто платит – тот и ставит музыку).

¹² NB – the radio station was ordered to be closed by the order of the General Prosecutor’s Office (General Prosecurate, if possible to translate so) from 1 March 2022. “Websites of ‘Dozhd’ and ‘EchoMoscow’ Are Blocked in Russia [В России Заблокировали Сайты ‘Эха Москвы’ и ‘Дождя’],” Meduza (Meduza, March 1, 2022), <https://meduza.io/news/2022/03/01/genprokuratura-rf-potrebovala-zablokirovat-sayty-eha-moskvy-i-dozhdy> (in Russian).

Vladimir Potanin's charity foundation.”¹³ Digital media outlets are also under the influence of the law: most of the Russian independent media outlets are labelled as “foreign agents” today: Meduza, Mediazona, The Insider and numerous regional media projects.¹⁴ Foreign media, such as Deutsche Welle or Bellingcat journalist investigating project, are considered foreign agents in Russia as well.¹⁵ Even YouTube bloggers who create a history-related content or speak about war are labelled as “foreign agents”: Maxim Katz, a Russian YouTube-blogger, and an oppositional politician, was labelled as a “foreign agent” by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.¹⁶ These are just some of the examples how Russian government uses law to silence alternative narratives.

The case of the civil rights organization Memorial stands out from the examples above. “Memorial” was one of the oldest civic organizations that emerged in 1989, right before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and founded by the Soviet dissidents, including Andrei Sakharov.¹⁷ The organization contributed to saving the Great Terror memory and helped to reveal the truth about political repressions in the Soviet Union. “Memorial” was labelled as a foreign agent in 2016 for receiving funds from abroad.¹⁸ Its members were under a constant threat from the government, and some of them found themselves in a dreadful situation. A Russian historian, Yuri Dmitriev, who discovered a Soviet execution site in Sandarmokh, Karelia, was sentenced to 15 years for alleged sexual abuse of his adoptive daughter after the discovery of the site.¹⁹ He was the head of the local branch of ‘Memorial’ in Karelia. The organization was ordered to be closed by the Moscow Court in December 2021, two days after its trial of Dmitriev. During the trial, the

¹³ “Ekaterina Schulman Is Labelled as ‘Foreign Agent’ For Her Salary at EchoMoscow Radiostation and at Shaninka School: OVD [Екатерину Шульман Признали ‘Иноагентом’ Из-За Зарплаты На ‘Эхо Москвы’ и в Шанинке: ОВД],” OVD-Info (OVD-Info, June 16, 2022), <https://ovd.news/express-news/2022/06/08/ekaterinu-shulman-priznali-inoagentom-iz-za-zarplaty-na-eho-moskvy-i-v> (in Russian).

¹⁴ “Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation [Министерство Юстиции Российской Федерации],” Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation (Government of the Russian Federation, August 4, 2022), <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/documents/7755/> (in Russian).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Илья Яшина и Максима Каца Объявили ‘Иностранцами’,” Meduza (Meduza, July 22, 2022), <https://meduza.io/news/2022/07/22/ilyu-yashina-i-maksima-katsa-ob-yavili-inostrannymi-agentami> (in Russian).

¹⁷ Katie Stallard, *Dancing on Bones: History and Power in China, Russia and North Korea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 155;

¹⁸ The Moscow Times, “Rights Group Memorial Declared ‘Foreign Agent’ (for Criticizing Law about ‘Foreign Agents’),” The Moscow Times (The Moscow Times, October 4, 2016), <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/10/04/human-rights-group-memorial-declared-foreign-agent-for-criticizing-law-about-foreign-agents-a55588>.

¹⁹ “Russia: Gulag Historian, Activist Yuri Dmitriyev Sentenced to 15 Years,” Deutsche Welle, December 27, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-gulag-historian-activist-yuri-dmitriyev-sentenced-to-15-years/a-60262435>.

state prosecutor called the organization ‘a public threat’ and accused it of being paid by the West to “falsely image USSR as a terrorist state and rehabilitate the Nazi war criminals.”²⁰

Such an acute response to the activity of a society of historians who aimed to preserve the information about the Great Terror period and gather information about the Soviet terror is explained in a surprisingly trivial way. “Memorial” posed a danger to Putin’s regime because of two simple reasons: the interference in Putin’s historical statecraft and deep concerns of the current leadership with the revelations of history of the Cheka, the “ancestor” of KGB and FSB of today. First, “Memorial” was the only large non-governmental organization in Russia that aimed to study history of Russia, focusing on the Stalin’s purges. No other organization in Russia tried to represent the society in the domain of public history than “Memorial.”²¹ By default, such a stance, a long history of activity, globally recognized name, and contributions to a civil society in Russia, will attract the attention of the Kremlin. A monopolization of history by the Kremlin, exemplified by the Great Patriotic War memory in Chapter II of the current dissertation, goes beyond the falsification of history: it aims to erase any challenging or inconvenient narratives. Putin’s Russia has chosen to use legislature to paralyze or cease activities of an organization, instead of a direct prohibition. This is done intentionally too: it is more beneficial for a regime to portray an organization as a “foreign agent” than to prohibit a recognized organisation, as distribution of “foreign agent” labels reinforces the propagated belief about the “evil West”, serving as a kind of reminder to the Russian population that “the enemy is among us,” resonating with the “besieged fortress” mentality. Hence, by prohibiting “Memorial,” Russia cast two birds with one stone: closed an organization that interfered in the production of historical narratives, reinforcing mnemonic hegemony and supported the artificially created myth about the enemies around Russia. Second, “Memorial” focused its research on the Soviet repressions and purges of 1930s-1950s. The purges and the extrajudicial executions were carried out by the *Cheka* (ЧК), an abbreviation for the All-Russian Emergency Committee (Всероссийская Чрезвычайная Комиссия), the ancestor of the Soviet KGB and modern Russia’s FSB. Many current political figures of Russia have started their

²⁰ Gleb Belichenko, “‘Creates a False Image of USSR as a Terrorist State.’ How Did the Russian Court Prohibit ‘Memorial’? [‘Создает Лживый Образ СССР Как Террористического Государства’. Как Суд Запрещал ‘Мемориал’],” Current Time [Настоящее Время], December 28, 2021, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/31630069.html> (in Russian).

²¹ Masha Gessen, “The Russian Memory Project That Became an Enemy of the State,” The New Yorker, January 6, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-russian-memory-project-that-became-an-enemy-of-the-state>.

career in this system, such as Sergei Kirienko,²² Igor Sechin,²³ and most notably, Vladimir Putin. His career started in KGB, and he still participates in the annual celebration of the *Cheka Day*, or the security agencies workers' day, as it called in Russian.²⁴ "Memorial" sought for the information about the Soviet repressions actively to challenge the information monopoly of the Soviet and Russian elites and provide an alternative. The activity of "Memorial" has been compromising all efforts of the *siloviki* clan with Putin as its head, who relentlessly tried to hide the atrocities of the Soviet *Cheka* in the "top secret" files, inaccessible for the public. With more knowledge about the Soviet crimes against humanity, the society would have realized the scale of a disaster that once has already happened, and that in turn, could have damaged the regime, the core of which is constituted of the successors of the *Cheka*. This is, of course, not the case in a regime with historical statecraft. Hence, the organization was destined to be closed, once and forever.

²² Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com), "Kiriienko Is No Reformer in the Kremlin: DW: 08.10.2016," DW.COM (Deutsche Welle, October 8, 2016), <https://www.dw.com/en/kiriienko-is-no-reformer-in-the-kremlin/a-35996576>.

²³ "Igor Sechin: Rosneft's Kremlin Hard Man Comes out of the Shadows," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, October 18, 2012), <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/oct/18/igor-sechin-rosneft-kremlin-hard-man-shadows>.

²⁴ Vladimir Putin, "Congratulations on Security Agency Worker's Day," President of Russia, December 20, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67387>; "Putin Salutes Russia's Intelligence Agencies on National 'Spies' Day'," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, December 20, 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/20/putin-salutes-russias-intelligence-agencies-on-national-spies-day>.

3.2. Government Intervention in Memory in Russia: Legislative Changes (2012-2021)

The reasons mentioned in Chapter II have influenced the emergence of the need for 2020 Constitutional Amendments. Their initial aim was to keep Putin in power after 2024, the year of his last term's end. Before the adoption of the Amendments, Putin was not able to be re-elected for the fifth time. However, the analysis below would argue that the Amendments additionally carried an intention to display the position of the government about historical memory and eventually consolidate the mnemonic hegemony by doing so. Mnemonic hegemony refers to the ability of a dominant group to impose its interpretations of history as universally true.¹ As any hegemony, it serves to maximize power and impose it over the others. The attempts of Putin to influence historical memory through the legislature could be seen as a crucial step in sustaining a mnemonic hegemony and excluding alternative or competing narratives and voices. Finally, the survival of the dictatorship depends not on censorship, but on the manipulation of public beliefs and how people perceive the world.² In this sense, the Amendments that would be analysed below are supporting that claim.

A first example would be Article 67 from the amended Constitution. For the sake of comparison, I am providing the Article 67 from the 1993 Russian Constitution first:

Article 67

1. The territory of the Russian Federation includes the territories of its constituent entities, internal waters and the territorial sea, and the airspace above them. Federal territories may be created on the territory of the Russian Federation by federal law. The organization of public authority in the federal territories is established by the said federal law <*>.
2. The Russian Federation has sovereign rights and exercises jurisdiction on the continental shelf and in the exclusive economic zone of the Russian Federation in the manner determined by federal law and international law.

¹ Berthold Molden, "Resistant Pasts versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory." *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (April 2016): 125–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698015596014>.

² Sergei M. Guriev and Daniel Treisman, "How Modern Dictators Survive: Cooptation, Censorship, Propaganda, and Repression," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, April 2015, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2571905>, 5.

- 2.1. The Russian Federation ensures the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Actions (except for delimitation, demarcation, and re-demarcation of the state border of the Russian Federation with neighbouring states) aimed at alienating part of the territory of the Russian Federation, as well as calls for such actions are not allowed <*>.
3. The boundaries between the subjects of the Russian Federation may be changed with their mutual consent.³

This article is very descriptive in its essence and is devoted exclusively to the definition of the territory of Russia, its territorial-administrative division, its rights of Russia, its regions, and their definition. It does not include any ideological or historical points. However, Article 67 was expanded recently and now includes a sub-article 67₁ that legally recognizes that Russia is a successor of the Soviet Union, recognizes the 'historically established state unity' and outlines the historical memory policy of the state. This addition was a part of the 2020 Constitutional Amendments.

Let us take a closer look at the paragraphs of the sub-article 67₁ from the amended Russian Constitution:

1. The Russian Federation is the legal successor of the USSR on its territory, as well as the legal successor of the USSR in respect of membership in international organizations, their bodies, participation in international treaties, as well as in respect obligations and assets of the former USSR, provided for by international treaties, outside the territory of the Russian Federation.⁴

At the first glance, Paragraph 1 poses no interest for this thesis. It outlines the legal continuity of the USSR and proclaims Russia the successor of the USSR. Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was the first and the largest part of the USSR, was generally associated with the whole Union, and Russians were the largest ethnic group in USSR. Nevertheless, the inclusion of such an article in the Constitution raises questions. Since 1991, Russia has been existing without the necessity for proclamation itself as the legal successor of the USSR. The nation fulfilled its obligations that remained from the Soviet times like Lend-Lease payments to the UK and the US and

³ "The Constitution of the Russian Federation," The constitution of the russian federation, December 25, 1993, <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>.

⁴ "New Text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation with 2020 Amendments [Новый Текст Конституции РФ с Поправками 2020]," The State Duma [Государственная Дума] (Government of the Russian Federation, July 3, 2020), <http://duma.gov.ru/news/48953/>, Article 67.1 (in Russian).

remained a permanent member of the UN Security Council. For what reason was this article included? It creates a metaphorical bond between modern Russia and the collapsed USSR. It is not only about the legal continuity, but also about the moral and historical continuity. What is more, it reflects the chronic insecurities that Putin and the regime survived after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Referring to Putin, he called the collapse of the USSR “the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the XX century”, emphasizing the importance of the Paragraph 1: it added the claim for continuity between Russia and USSR that intends to seal the discontinuity and is important from the perspective of historical memory. Russian government tries to monopolize the victory in WWII and reinforce historical memory discourse by including Paragraph 1 in the current Constitution. According to Kopusov, the amendments could be seen as the protection of the national narrative as they “openly privilege the memory of an oppressive regime over that of its victims.”⁵

2. The Russian Federation, united by a thousand-year history, preserving the memory of the ancestors who passed on to us ideals and faith in God, as well as continuity in the development of the Russian state, recognizes the historically established state unity.⁶

Paragraph 2 of the current Article offers a particular vision of Russian history and pictures the state’s interest in monopolizing historical memory. From my perspective, passages on the ‘*thousand-year history of the Russian Federation*’ and on the ‘*preserving the memory of the ancestors who passed on to us ideals and faith in God, as well as continuity in the development of the Russian state*’, intends to fix the long-standing history of Russian imperialism and emphasize the state’s dominant discourse on historical memory. Firstly, I find these assumptions historically incorrect since the Russian state has existed in various forms and had different systems in the last thousand years. For example, the Russian Empire, which was founded by Czar Peter the Great in 1721, was an absolutist monarchy. The 1917 October Revolution and the following Civil War of 1918-1920 resulted in the creation of the RSFSR and the Soviet Union in 1922, the first socialist state with a single-party system. I could not acknowledge any continuity if the country had radically different political systems in

⁵ Nikolay Kopusov, ““The Only Possible Ideology”: Nationalizing History in Putin’s Russia,” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 24:2, September 2021, DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2021.1968148, 205-215, 215.

⁶ “New Text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation with 2020 Amendments [Новый Текст Конституции РФ с Поправками 2020],” The State Duma [Государственная Дума] (Government of the Russian Federation, July 3, 2020), <http://duma.gov.ru/news/48953/>, Article 67.1 (in Russian).

operation throughout the last 150 years. There is no continuity, but what is the reason for including this exact phrasing in the Constitution? In a certain way, this paragraph intends to fill in the gaps that disrupted the continuity of the Russian state and create a sense of a thousand-years long continuity of the Russian state. Secondly, another peculiar point here is the *memory of the ancestors* that carries the belief in God. According to the Constitution, Russia is a secular state without an official religion. In the USSR, religion and religious rituals were prohibited by the state. Today, Russia positions itself as the guardian of conservative and traditional values. I assume that this passage is included because of that and intends to contribute to the creation of a new Russian identity. However, this passage is also a considerable rhetorical contradiction: Russia is the direct ancestor of the Soviet Union and is a multinational country, in which people and their ancestors could have been atheists, for instance. Yet the ancestral belief in God is fixed in the country's main law, the Constitution, making that assumption a hasty generalization. If its factual importance is insignificant for the state, then the paragraph was added to reinforce the narrative of the Russian greatness and display the continuity between modern Russia and its days of glory, when Russia was a part of either USSR or the Russian Empire. Again, here I must refer to the idea of *Derzhavnost*, as the line on the historical unity assumes that Russia's unity was achieved due. To sum up, briefly, these assumptions are useful for the regime as they fix the historical greatness of Russia, support the formation of a new identity, based on traditional values, and support the myth of the great power status of Russia.

3. The Russian Federation honours the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland and ensures the protection of historical truth. Derogation of the significance of the feat of the people in the defence of the Fatherland is not allowed.⁷

Paragraph 3 presents an explicit example of the state's discourse on historical memory. Firstly, this paragraph re-emphasizes the role of the Russian army today and the historical importance of the Red Army to Russia. The defenders of the Fatherland, *защитники Отечества* in Russian, is an expression that has continuously been applied to the Red Army soldiers who fought in WWII. Even though this word combination is applied to the Russian soldiers today, the main association remains the same – the Great Patriotic War and the Soviet people in the military. Secondly, the paragraph states that Russia '*ensures the protection of historical truth*', which serves as

⁷ Ibid.

a particular marker of the state's readiness to interfere in public and historical memory. What is more, the word 'truth' in this exact context raises two additional questions: "what is truth?" and "who defines the truth?" The paragraph indirectly states that the government is responsible for the establishment of the historical truth. The following sentence of the paragraph states that it is not allowed to doubt the historical rightness of the deeds of the 'defenders', implying that in such a case, a punishment could be issued for going against the official position. This passage shows how Russia tries to create a mnemonic hegemony: by denying the possibility to doubt the significance of the *defenders*, Russia tries to position the official vision of history as the universal and undeniable truth. I suppose that this passage was added to support the Great Patriotic War myth in Russia that has been actively pushed during Putin's twenty years in power. Apart from the straightforward wish to ascend the myth, the introduction of such a paragraph also covers up and even officially denies the war crimes of the Red Army and the USSR in general. What is more, such a narrative creates a foundation for the state to ignore Russian war crimes in Chechnya and Syria, during the siege of Grozny and devastating Aleppo bombardments. The paragraph diminishes the historical importance of Stalin's purges by casting a shadow over these historical events. Remarkably, the paragraph might lead to the exclusion of the purges from the historical discourse under the threat of punishment, leaving space for the Russian police to interpret accusations of the Soviets in crimes against humanity as a condemnation of the historical memory of WWII in the country and apparently, as the violation of a newly designed article of the Constitution.

3.3 Conclusion

As it can be seen from the chapter, the legislative system has become additional means for strengthening Putin's powers. Russian regime uses two particular legislative tools to control historical memory. In 2012, the Law on Foreign Agents was implemented as a result of Bolotnaya protests which nearly shattered Putin's presidentialism. Aiming to reduce the power of opposition, the implementation of this law has been continuously growing, culminating from the start of the full-scale war, towards individuals and media sources that criticize Putin's regime. However, the use of the legislature for the historical statecraft could also be non-trivial, as the case of "Memorial" demonstrated: to silence alternative historical narratives. A law on foreign agents is not specifically designed for limiting the work of historians; however, the Russian government has used this specific law to eliminate a non-governmental civic organization that carried numerous research that concern the history of the Soviet Union. The Constitutional Amendments of 2020 have become not only the tool of prolonging Putin's possibility to stay in power, but also a tool of historical statecraft, serving partly as the memory laws that proclaim the single, state-defended historical truth about sensitive issues like the foundation of the Russian state, its Soviet heritage and most importantly, the war memory. Besides, the amendments legalized the myth of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, prohibiting the critique of Stalin's and USSR army's actions during the WWII. The honouring of the "defenders of the fatherland" has also become a tool for pressuring opposition legally, as it can be seen from the case of Navalny in the first chapter, who was accused of disrespecting the WWII veteran and was fined for 850.000 rubbles. Therefore, legislative tools have enshrined the concept of single historical truth in the Constitution, strengthened Putin's power, and have been actively used to fight Putin's critics and opposition politicians.

4. Russia's Weaponization of History: the Russo-Ukrainian War as a Memory War

In the previous chapters, I have analyzed historical statecraft in Putin's Russia. Russia's historical discourse was primarily hidden in legislation, including the 2020 Constitutional Amendments, and in the speeches of officials like Putin or Medvedev. However, on the 24th of February 2022, a full-scale invasion of Ukraine was launched by Russia. Admittedly, the discourse is not hidden anymore, has become more evident in the form of internal propaganda, but has also been vented externally as the historical statecraft of Putin's Russia spilled over into Ukraine, providing a new dimension of analysis for this thesis. The central aim of Chapter IV is to find out the elements of Putin's historical statecraft that were used in the context of the war against Ukraine by answering the following sub question: *"How have the narratives and the use of Russian historical statecraft changed in the context in the 2022 Russian invasion of the Ukraine?"*

In order to understand the implication of historical statecraft on the war in Ukraine, I define three main topics: 1) the evolution of Putin's war justification; 2) the internal 'othering' of Ukraine; 3) *pobedobesiye* (victory cult). These elements are crucial as they present the way history is manipulated on the official. Thus, the chapter is divided according to the following logic: first, I will outline the discursive context of Russia at the example of Putin's February 24 war speech; Second, I will analyze how Ukraine was "othered" in Russia through the selective application of history and by creating a mishmash of ideas while giving the historical context of the current conflict, Third, I will display how Great Patriotic War memory shapes the discourse of the Russian officials with the provision of examples; and finally, I will explain why is the war needed according to Putin's regime.

4.1. The Evolution of Putin's Discourse on the War in Ukraine

The start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was marked by Putin's speech on the 24th of February which was aimed to justify the inevitability of the war. The all-out land invasion of Ukraine was named as a "special military operation in Donbas", which later turned into the "special military operation on liberation of the occupied territories" and "special military operation in Ukraine". This sub-chapter covers Putin's war speech in the first day of military intervention as it describes the main reasoning of war and plays a significant role in discovering how history is being used by Putin. When the missiles started to fall from the sky on Ukrainian cities and villages in the February morning, Putin addressed Russian citizens with a speech on this military escalation of the 8-years long conflict in Donetsk and Lugansk regions. This war speech is crucial for understanding the way Putin manipulates history for reasoning. Thus, it will be analyzed both with the grain and against the grain to have the full picture of his Address to the Nation.

Looking at the discourse with the grain, it is significant to look at his speech from the historical context, context of narration and discursive context. From the historical context outlook, this speech refers to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by the creation of the two separatist People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk. Their separation tendencies were supported by the Russian military and intelligence as well as by propaganda which promoted hostile attitude towards Ukraine. The main reasoning for the support of separatists was the belonging of the people of Donbas to *Malorossy* (literally "small Russians") or overall Russian-speaking ethnic group. Historical reasoning has a leading role in military intervention reasoning. In the beginning of his speech, Putin refers to history of Russia, from ancient to the USSR one, to explain why the Crimean and Malorossy territories should belong to Russia:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our **shared history** and **pride**. This is the location of **ancient Khersones**, where **Prince Vladimir** was **baptized**...¹ The graves of **Russian** soldiers whose bravery **brought Crimea** into the **Russian empire**... This is also Sevastopol... a fortress that serves as the **birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet**. Crimea as Balaklava and Kertsch, Malakhov

¹ Chersonessus – an ancient Greek city that was situated on the Crimean Peninsula, not to be understood for Kherson, a Ukrainian city in the south of country that is now occupied by the Russians. Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavovitch is the Slavic prince that baptized as an Orthodox Christian and brought Christianity to the Kievan Rus' in 988.

Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is **dear to our hearts**, **symbolizing Russian military glory** and **outstanding valor**.²

In this paragraph, it can be seen the crucial role history of Russia plays for Putin in invading Ukraine. He presents Crimea and adjacent territories as the essential part of significant events in Russian history: the Christianization of the Kievan Rus,³ the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Empire in 1783, and the Crimean War of 1853-1856. Besides, he associates Crimea with the times of glory of the Russian Empire, making this rhetoric a significant patriotic stimulus. Here, Putin once again refers to the *Derzhavnost* idea by naming military and imperial achievements of the Russian Empire with which he connects the greatness of modern Russia and conveniently argues why Crimea must have been annexed.

In terms of the context of narration, the decline of Putin's popularity required actions which would stimulate the patriotic attitude of the nation and would increase people's trust in him. Previously mentioned in Chapter 2.1., the *Crimean consensus*, an upsurge of Putin's support among Russians after the annexation of Crimea, showed the positive effect of the "strong hand of the politician"³⁴ on the masses. Therefore, launching a full-scale war as a continuation of the hybrid war that started in 2014 and was directed towards the strengthening of consolidation of the society and legitimization of president's power. Thus, the sentimental rhetoric of Crimea and adjacent territories being "dear to *our* hearts" was aimed at showing the unity of the national idea and the nation's interests, to bolster nationalism. Furthermore, a significant portion of Putin's narrative surrounded NATO's "expansion to the East", which Putin perceives as a threat to territorial sovereignty of Russia. In his speech, he argued that if Ukraine had joined NATO, Crimea would have been occupied by NATO's navy which "would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory." Putin has continuously spoken against a possibility of Ukraine's integration to NATO, seeing it as a threat to national security of Russia, which needed preventive actions. Therefore, the context of narration shows that Russia creates an image of a revisionist state, the goal of which is to recreate 'historical justice' and gain back the trust of the citizens in Putin and his regime.

² Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation (President of Russia, February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

³ Artyom Zemtsov, "'Strong Hand': Authoritarianism in the Political Culture of Modern Russians," *The Journal of Political Theory, Political Philosophy and Sociology of Politics "Politeia"* 95, no. 4 (2019): pp. 87-110, <https://doi.org/10.30570/2078-5089-2019-95-4-87-110>, 88-91 (in Russian).

⁴ NB – A widespread belief among the Russians about the style of leadership – they tend to believe that the ruler should be tough yet just – a certain form of a benevolent dictator, so to speak.

Looking at discursive context, it is significant to remind of the Russian nationalist and “Russian world” ideas embedded in Putin’s narrative. Thus, Putin presents himself as the defender and liberator of the “Russian world”:

“(..) Crimeans and Sevastopol residents made their choice to be with their historical homeland, with Russia, and we supported this. I repeat, **they simply could not do otherwise.**”⁵

Through speaking for the Russians, Putin emphasizes the ethnic connection between the Russians and Maloross people of Donbas, claiming the position of belonging of Crimea, Donetsk, and Lugansk to Russia. Thus, the idea of the “Russian world” is presented as a *casus bello* for launching a war. He presented Ukraine as an oppressor of the Russian nation, arguing that it left “*no other choice*” but start military invasion to protect ethnic Russians and Russian citizens.

“You and I simply have not been left with any other opportunity to protect Russia, our people, except for the one that **we will be forced to use today.**”⁶

By repeating this narrative several times, Putin enshrines the thought of war as the only choice into the minds of his audience, justifying this narrative through repetition and persuasion. Moreover, by applying the discourse of the ‘self’ to the people of Donbas he creates the rhetoric of historical belonging of them to Russia and its people, using sentiments to give emotional value to his speech. By presenting himself as a narrator, i.e., “agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text”⁷, Putin shows himself as a liberator through the narrative delivered. At the same time, he frequently uses “We” or “You and “I” in his speech, which creates the feeling of support and unity with the nation, and persuades the masses in decision being not unilateral, but ultimately agreed by the Russian citizens. The narrative of “protection of our people” demonstrates this invasion as a result of “good” intentions and presents Putin and Russia as saviours of oppressed people of Donetsk and Lugansk regions. Besides, the narrative of being “*forced*” to invade to the sovereign state is aimed to justify the decision of being illegitimate, providing the meaning of preventive war. Hence, his discourse mainly applies to promotion of national interest in the invasion, protection of

⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation (President of Russia, February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 19-21.

national security, liberation of oppressed and good will, used to create legitimacy of this action decided unilaterally by the Russian government. Interestingly, Putin referred to the people of Ukraine as “my dear friends,” similar as he is approaching Russians, contrasting them to people in power whom he calls “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites”. Thus, he constructs the division between Ukrainian people: they either should be inclined to support Russian hostile actions towards Ukraine, or they automatically belonging to “neo-Nazis” in power.

The second leading discursive context that Putin uses in his speech is the mistrust towards the West and accusation of the US and NATO in violation of international law:

“(..) First, without any sanction from the UN Security Council, **they carried out a bloody military operation against Belgrade**, using aircraft and missiles right in the very center of Europe. (..) **We** have to remind about these facts, otherwise, **some Western colleagues do not like to remember those events**, and when we talk about it, they prefer to point not to the norms of international law, but to the circumstances that they interpret as they see fit.”⁸

Firstly, this paragraph is important in terms of justification of Russian military invasion through drawing parallels between Russia and military interventions of NATO and the US, showing that it was the Western world who started the practice of unsanctioned military operations first. However, the justification of military actions through referring to military operations of the West goes against the main ‘us’ and ‘them’ discourse, which leads his relation towards the West. At the same time, his discourse contains the emphasis on national interests to protect Russian territories and values which are presented as contradictory to Western ones. The “us-them” narrative highlights the opposition of Russia and the West with “us”, “our”, “I”; and “we” relating to Russian citizens, Russian army, Putin himself and Russia as a state; and “them,” “their” relate to the US and the West in general. The other significant use of “us-them” and diffidence discourse refers to the accusation of the West in affecting Russian domestic politics:

“(..) As for our country, after the collapse of the USSR, with all the unprecedented openness of the new modern Russia, the readiness to work

⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation (President of Russia, February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

honestly with the United States and other Western partners, and in the conditions of virtually unilateral disarmament, **they immediately tried to squeeze us, finish off and destroy us completely**. This is exactly what happened in the 90s, in the early 2000s, when the so-called collective West most actively supported separatism and mercenary gangs in southern Russia.”⁹

This opposition refers to the unacceptance by the current regime of the West being an unspoken winner of the Cold War. Furthermore, the recurring narrative about the “dashing 90s” of Putin gains the “second life” in this context: the 1990s in Russia are not associated with a democratic transitions and reforms, but with the crisis and poverty, for which Putin blames the West. Moreover, by drawing West as an antipode to Russia, Putin constructs Russian national identity through differentiation in its formation.¹⁰ This opposition presents an example of a “conflictual nature of discourse” that exists in a dialogue which opposes other discourses.¹¹ Besides, as identity is constructed through the process of interaction,¹² which creates interdependence between the discourse and identity, which is constructed through the “Self” opposed to the Western “Other”. Therefore, reading with the grain showed that Putin is a single narrator in this speech, while the leading discourses are those of national security, national interests, and nationalism itself. Besides, it showed how Putin uses history to justify the belonging of the Crimean and Donbas territories to Russia.

The use of reading against the grain helps to see the hidden meanings enshrined in Putin’s speech. Rizzo described it as a method of critical reading which allows to see discourses, contradictory to the ones given by the narrator.¹³

The problem is that in the territories adjacent to us, I will note, in our own historical territories, an 'anti-Russia' hostile to us is being created, which has been placed under complete external control, is intensively settled by the armed forces of NATO countries, and is pumped up with the most modern weapons.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 7-9.

¹¹ Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2008), 10-11.

¹² Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?,” *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 1996, pp. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907.n1>, 4.

¹³ Mary Rizzo, “Reading against the Grain, Finding the Voices of the Detained,” *Museums & Social Issues* 12, no. 1 (March 2, 2017): pp. 26-32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15596893.2017.1289779>, 28.

¹⁴ Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation (President of Russia, February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

In this paragraph we saw how Putin connects the Ukrainian struggle for independence with an alliance with the West. Thus, he perceives the construction of an independent Ukrainian identity connected to “the West” as its "other". Besides, by referring to Ukrainian people as “fraternal,” he also erases Ukrainian independent identity as the phrase “fraternal nations” was the leading one to describe the unity of the USSR republics. The relations between Russia and Ukraine were seen from the Russian side as the ones of the “Big Brother” and “Little Brother” respectively, which automatically shows the perception of Ukraine as a weaker and even submissive state.¹⁵

¹⁵ Victor Kattan, “Big Brother v. Little Brother: A Critical Analysis of Russian President Putin’s Legal Justifications for Russia’s Preventive War in Ukraine”, *Jurist*, March 18, 2022, <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2022/03/victor-kattan-russia-ukraine-legal-justifications/>

4.2. Internal “Othering” of Ukraine as a Mean of Russian Historical Statecraft

In the previous subchapter I displayed how Putin uses “the self” and “the other” discourse around the relations between Russia and Ukraine, exemplified by his war speech. It demonstrates how Putin views Ukraine as being turned into ‘the other’ by the West and current people in power. At the same time, he refers to the people of Ukraine as “the self,” highlighting the historical unity of Russia and Ukraine. This two-fold logic is also seen in Putin’s most recent essay “On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” where Putin labels Ukraine as “the anti-Russia.”¹ At the same time, Putin has been expressing the thought that Russians and Ukrainians are a single folk (*narod*) for quite a long time. It was explicitly clear even in his Crimean speech from March 2014, in which he motivates annexation by “saving ethnic Russians and hearing their prayers to come back in the home haven”.² He also refers to the common history in the Kievan Rus’ times and appeals to the shared religion, Eastern Orthodoxy.³ Remarkably, Putin once again questioned the statehood of Ukraine indirectly, through his attempt to analyze the origin of the state’s name: “The name “Ukraine” was used more often in the meaning of the Old Russian word “**okraina**” (periphery), which is found in written sources from the 12th century, referring to various border territories. And the word “Ukrainian”, judging by archival documents, originally **referred to frontier guards who protected the external borders.**”⁴ Therefore, it is important to look at how Ukraine has been continuously transformed from “the self” to “the other”, undergoing the process of “othering” with the use of Russia’s historical statecraft. In this chapter, I am intentionally writing the term “othering” in quotation marks. I define “othering” as the alienation of a previously considered part of the greater whole through the construction of the “us-them” discourse. In this case, “othering” is the alienation of Ukraine and Ukrainian

¹ Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>; РИА Новости, “Putin Claims On The Western Project ‘Anti-Russia’ [Путин Заявил о Западном Проекте ‘Анти-Россия],” RIA Novosti [РИА Новости] (FSUE INA “Russia Today” [ФГУП МИА “Россия сегодня”], July 12, 2021), <https://ria.ru/20210712/putin-1740963820.html> (in Russian).

² Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>;

³ Olga Allenova, Elena Geda, and Vladimir Novikov (in Russian), “NATO Block Broke into Block Packets, [Блок НАТО Разошелся На Блокпакеты],” The Kommersant Newspaper #57 (3874) from 07.04.2008 [Газета Коммерсантъ № 57 (3874) от 07.04.2008], April 6, 2008, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/877224> (in Russian).

⁴ Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” President of Russia, July 12, 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

people from the historical and political discourse in the Russian Federation that happens because of the belief of the latter in the identity change of the former, causing the “othering.”

Where are the roots of Russia’s position vis-à-vis Ukraine? As I have continuously stated throughout the thesis, Putin’s regime has no clearly outlined ideology. Instead, it is a collection of the elements, taken from a variety of ideas and concepts and applied whenever needed. Echoes of previously mentioned *Derzhavnost*, Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism – a set of ideas that unites revanchism, Russian imperialism and chauvinism (e.g. towards Ukrainians) and pretends to be an ideology, imperialist nostalgia and political Soviet heritage could be found in current Russia’s regime. It may seem a cacophony, but only from the first sight. The absence of a well-structured ideology in Russia allows Putin to adapt historical statecraft for his current needs, without devoting too much effort to ideology creation and sustaining it. Furthermore, this flexibility helps Putin’s regime by veiling everything with misinformation: it is clearly seen in the evolution of Putin’s relation to Ukraine. In other words, in the situation when the regime has nothing to offer ideology wise, the roots of Ukraine’s “othering” in Russia are intertwined and could be found in various intellectual and political sources presented below, but they do not form a coherent entity. Hence, it is worth to find out what ideas are perpetuating in the regime and what is the role of history in Russia from the political perspective.

In his book “The Road to Unfreedom” (2019), Timothy Snyder brilliantly reflects on the connection between Russia’s regime obsession with history and the issue of ideology. He proposes two types of political meta-narratives: *politics of inevitability* and *politics of eternity*. Politics of inevitability is “a sense that the future is just more of the present, the laws of progress are known, that there are no alternatives and therefore, nothing really to be done.”⁵ In the global West, the politics of inevitability prevailed for quite a continuous period of time but differed in the origin. In Europe, history resulted in the emergence of the nation that in turn, learned out that peace is better than war and “chose integration and prosperity.”⁶ In the US, it was the nature that influenced the emergence of the market, market resulted in democracy and the latter “brought happiness.”⁷ Remarkably, prior to its fall, the USSR had its inevitability that was assumed by the communist ideology: nature leads to the evolution of technology,

⁵ Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (Random House US, 2019), 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁷ *Ibid.*

technological advances produce social change, social change create revolutions and revolutions “enact utopia.”⁸ In the Soviet version, utopia was an idea of a classless society. The fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War reinforced the belief in the politics of inevitability in the West and produced some claims like Fukuyama’s “end of the world” thought. This fall has also caused the Soviet politics of inevitability to collapse with the state and become substituted with the politics of eternity. Contrary to the Western inevitability politics that premise on Andersonian perception of history as “uncertain” yet inevitable, politics of eternity erases time and voids the notion of “future” as the chronospatial concept because future could be edited, as well as the past, effectively cancelling both. “Politicians of the eternity” artificially manipulate the emotions and artificially create crises to distant future from the people and “drown them in the past.”⁹ Both politics of inevitability and eternity turn facts into narratives, however, the politics of eternity are directed to eradicate factuality, substitute it with the fake reality as the facts are an obstacle in creation of an eternity and “make other ideas unthinkable.”¹⁰ History for eternal politics is crucial, as the control over it enables the eternity. History exists in facts that are either documented or have a material proof that confirm a certain historical event. If the history is being manipulated and controlled, then the eternity is to be created. To be precise, the absence of the ideology in Russia is not an absence per se, it is the politics of eternity, a framework, in which time and history has no meaning and the history is an instrument that keeps the eternity going on.

Kleptocracy of Russia cemented the regime, preventing any other challenging political force to emerge, and enabled Russia to introduce the politics of eternity. They base on the ideas of Russian fascist philosopher of the twentieth century, Ivan Ilyin. Snyder claims that his ideas have reincarnated today in the form of politics of eternity and premise on three features: “(...) celebration of will and violence over the reason and law, a leader with a mystical connection to his people; and characterization of globalization as a conspiracy rather than a set of problems.”¹¹ Ilyin saw individuality as the evil that must be eradicated in the name of the unity, seeing the nation as a living creature, innocent by default.¹² Interestingly, the “othering” of Ukraine resonates in Ilyin’s philosophy through seeing a nation as an organism: he denied the existence of Ukrainians apart from the Russian “body”: “To speak of Ukraine was to be a mortal

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 30, 121.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹² Ibid., pp. 22-23.

enemy of Russia.”¹³ Following his premise on the mission of the Russian nation as the “redeemers,” the materialization of the divine totality that wages its eternal war against individualism and decadence,¹⁴ it is possible to claim that the war against Ukraine also goes in line with Snyder’s analysis and apparently, with Ilyin’s philosophy. Snyder reflects on the relations between Russia and Ukraine and argues that the concept of the “Russian world” directly contradicts the Ukrainian identity, and hence, individuality, involuntarily making a Ukrainian person a part of the collective, a part of the eternity.¹⁵ As Ukraine is portrayed as the “puppet of the West” by Russia, it becomes a target for a purge by the political entity of eternity. Ukraine is being “othered” in this case to the extent of alienation: Russian historical statecraft that exists because of the politics of eternity, creates narratives that intend to cause an emotional reaction among the Russian population and disregard facts (e.g., labelling Ukrainians as “Nazis” and accusing them in crimes against civilians, shifting the blame for targeting civilians, etc.) that in turn, eliminates empathy and dilutes the understanding of the issue in a consciousness of a person. In the absence of any other historical narratives due to the reasons mentioned in Chapter II and Chapter III, the politics of eternity make historical statecraft an efficient instrument in the hands of Putin and “other” Ukraine in the perception of Russians.

In the search of the roots of “othering” of Ukraine, one should consider the history of Russia’s development. Apart from the imperial vision of the self, most of the Russian states shared a set of distinct features throughout history. Arbatova (2020) outlined the following features: “rigid authoritarian rule; the subordination of the economy to political and military goals; a repressive law-enforcement system; a repressive law-enforcement system; the merging of the state with the church; a messianic ideology; an imperial foreign policy and militarism.”¹⁶ These features of the “Russian statehood” have been developing under the influence of a variety of events that enlarged the gap between Russia and the West as the Golden Horde, autocephaly of the Moscow Patriarchate. The Russian rulers saw a challenge in Europe and instead of reforms, Russia focused on its military might and modernized only where it saw necessary to.¹⁷ By stating this, I wanted to display that the imperialist notions of Russia have certain distinct roots in the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 24-27.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁶ Nadezhda Arbatova, “Three Faces of Russia’s Neo-Eurasianism,” *Survival* 61, no. 6 (2019): pp. 7-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1688562>, 12.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

form of Russia's unique path of development that in turn, produces the worldview of Russia. Its authoritarianism with a strong militarist connotation resonated numerous times on the territories that surround it, and Ukraine is not an exception. This argument could contribute to the overall argument on the origin of today's "othering" of Ukraine in Russia's historical statecraft, as the latter pursues the great power status and glorifies the imperial eras like the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. Partially, this could be counted as an additional reason why Russia has started a war against Ukraine and how historical statecraft is contributing to its "othering": Russian imperialism and the use of history by Putin result in the "othering" of Ukraine through denying its sovereignty and attempting to subordinate Ukraine and incorporate it into Russia, while seeing Ukrainians as a part of the same nation at the same time.

British-Ukrainian scholar Taras Kuzio remarks that the "othering" of Ukraine, as I label it, has been a continuous process with Russian nationalism at its core. His central arguments are that a) Russia does not want to be an independent state and "prefers to be a center of the empire" and b) does not want to accept Ukraine as a separate people, nation with its own language.¹⁸ Interestingly, he follows up his argument, claiming that both Russia and Ukraine demonstrated nationalist behaviour. However, it differed because of the context: on one side, there is Russia, a political entity that has continuously incorporated itself into some greater identical construction like the Russian Empire or the USSR, building a nationalist empire. On the other side, there is Ukraine that had defensive nationalism with a clear anti-imperial stance, a nation that has been subject to "denationalization by Russia," according to Kuzio, and has been incorporated into some greater entity that was identically different.¹⁹ In this regard, he draws parallels between the relations of Ireland and UK and Ukraine and Russia.²⁰ For example, he argues that the processes of Anglicization in Ireland and Russification in Ukraine were aimed to prioritize imperial *lingua franca* and "were promoted as the languages of civilization and modernity, while Ukrainian and Irish were derided as **provincial peasant tongues**."²¹ Such a language policy was accompanied by the discursive division into *Velikorossy* (predominantly ethnic Russians) and *Malorossy* mentioned before. The latter was not seen in the Russian Empire as an independent ethnic entity and included not only Ukrainians, but also Belarusians. In the Soviet era, the same story

¹⁸ Taras Kuzio, *Putin's War against Ukraine: Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, an Amazon.com Company, 2017), 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

has happened with Ukraine: it was a part of the USSR as a national republic, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and in general, the Soviet strategy did not change from the Tsarist era.²² Forced Russification went hand in hand with forced collectivization and industrialization that in turn, contributed greatly to the *Holodomor* – a mass famine that took hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian lives. The argument of Kuzio is that the language and cultural domination of Russia plays a vital role in its imperialism and contributes to the war of today. In this case, the “othering” of Ukraine is questionable as the Russian states like the Russian Empire, or the USSR aimed to dilute Ukrainian national identity and to incorporate into the “self,” instead of “othering” – a purely nationalist notion that is centered on the “self.” At the same time, “othering” of Ukraine from the Russian perspective is in its attempts to reinforce national identity through the decommunization politics and transition to the use of Ukrainian as a single national language. These processes concern a shift of identity and hence, a change in the “self-other” dichotomy.

Kuzio’s argument is enhanced by Applebaum’s vision of an intentional de-Ukrainization in the years of the USSR. She argues that the *Cheka*, the ancestor of today’s FSB and the Soviet’s KGB, used famine tactics in combination with purges to suppress the Ukrainian identity.²³ In addition to that, Russians introduced the program of “de-Cossackization,” an artificial selection process, that resulted in more than twelve thousand executed people and numerous individuals from Russia were introduced to the region “to dilute the Don Cossack identity.”²⁴ Historically, the Cossacks had a democratic tradition – they had a parliamentary system, lived in the proto-state entity called the Zaporizhian Sych and opposed the surrounding empires. Remarkably, the Sych was militarily destroyed by the Russian troops of Catherine II in 1775. Appelbaum’s argument complements the position of Kuzio and presents a continuity in the complicated relations of Russians and Ukrainians. In all the aforementioned involvements of the Russians into the affairs of the Ukrainian people, I see a pattern here, as both imperial entities aimed to suppress an emergence of the Ukrainian national state and national identity overall. Coincidentally, the pattern resonates in today’s Russia idea of the *Ruski Mir* – a geopolitical quasi-imperial entity that is dominated by the Russian identity, culture, language, and own interpretation of history. The process in itself, especially the actions of the Soviets during the Revolution and

²² Ibid., pp. 71-77.

²³ Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine*. (Toronto, ON: Signal, 2018), 55-57.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 89.

Holodomor, are definitely an example of the “othering” of Ukraine: the Russians distorted the usual life of Ukrainians by collectivization and expropriation of food, forcing traditionally rural Ukrainians to feed newly urbanizing Russians. However, this continuity is not “othering,” but rather a colonial forceful submission and once again, an attempt to dilute the Ukrainian identity and merge it into the greater construct of Russia.

In Russia, the ideas of othering of Ukraine are existing even today and it seems that they do resonate in the current policy of Russia. Ideas of Alexander Dugin, a niche Russian thinker, are a prominent example of the evolution of the *Derzhavnost'*-style imperial narratives.²⁵ Dugin sees the great power status of Russia and Russian imperialism as central, producing the idea of neo-Eurasianism: a destiny of Russia to get rid of Western modernism and regain cultural roots, ultimately uniting Europe and Asia, and Russia is thought to be an architect of the process.²⁶ In the vision of Dugin, there is a civilizational mission of Russia that is explained historically, meaning that Russia’s actual imperialism in Eurasia is its primary aim. Remarkably, neo-Eurasianism leaves no place for sovereign Ukraine in the perspective it offers. Neo-Eurasianism views Ukraine as an “unnatural state,” that is made up from four regions that relate to different outer political entities, and serves as the sanitary cordon between Eurasia and the West.²⁷ For neo-Eurasianist Russia, the Russian-speaking *Malorossiya*, East and South of Ukraine, including Donbass, Luhansk and Crimea, and Central Ukraine are crucial because of close historic, ethnic, cultural and linguistic ties with Russia and must be a part of Russia.²⁸ The views of Dugin were radicalized after Russia’s intervention in Georgia in 2008: for him, the war marked the start of Russia’s “crusade” against the global Euroatlanticism. The existence of independent Ukraine is an existential threat to Russia and its Eurasian project because sovereign Ukraine compromises regional security by leaving a blank space between geopolitical axis of the world, increasing the risk of a military conflict between Eurasia and the West for that territory. Dugin argued that the “*Ukrainian question*” has to be resolved.²⁹ By using this provocative wording that throws the reader back to the times of Nazi Germany’s existence, Dugin meant the destruction of Ukraine as a political entity, as a state. In the logic of neo-Eurasianism,

²⁵ Tara Isabella Burton, “Perspective | the Far-Right Mystical Writer Who Helped Shape Putin's View of Russia,” *The Washington Post* (WP Company, May 13, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/05/12/dugin-russia-ukraine-putin/>.

²⁶ Aleksandr Dugin, *The Foundation of Geopolitics: A Geopolitical Future of Russia* [*Основы Геополитики: Геополитическое Будущее России*] (Moscow: "Arktogeia", 1997), 43 (in Russian).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53.

²⁹ Aleksandr Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory* (London: Arktos, 2012), 82.

Russia must influence the collapse of Ukraine by a combination of military and non-military means and take control over the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine to neutralize a threat for Eurasianist Russia. Dugin's ideological concept is closely intertwined with the geopolitics – a concept that is vaguely defined within IR (International Relations) and has a plenty of meanings, yet it is being massively used by the Russian officials and their clique.³⁰ According to Vladimir Naxera (2018), Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism was intended to fill in the normative gap that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its ideological structure.³¹

The neo-Eurasianist idea has continuously been pushed in Ukrainian South and East, Russian-speaking regions, since early 2000s by Dugin and political figures like Eduard Limonov, the co-founder of the National-Bolshevik Party of Russia (НБП, NBPR), prohibited in 2007 with accordance to the anti-extremist laws.³² Anton Shekovtsov, a Russian political scientist who studies Dugin and neo-Eurasianist ideology, claims that the ideas of Dugin have created a formidable foundation for the outbreak of Russo-Ukrainian War in 2014 but the activity of Eurasianists, led by Dugin, slowed down after 2014.³³ The ultimate aim was to initiate a civil war in Ukraine, in which Russia would step in and occupy parts of the country. The foundation for that started to build up after the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine that ended with the victory of pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko on the presidential elections against pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych. Such a change in the political life of Ukraine urged Russia to initiate the mobilization of pro-Russian voters in Ukraine, intended to keep Ukraine in the hard grip of Russia.

Once again, the idea is closely connected to the revanchist attitudes, produced in Russia after the fall of the USSR, as Neo-Eurasianism sets greatness of Russia as the ultimate goal, while imperialism and territorial expansions or Eurasian unity are just the means for achieving the greatness or restoring the status of *derzhava*, the great power. The “othering” here plays an instrumental role of restoring the greatness; nevertheless, from the perspective of Neo-Eurasianism, Ukraine is rather a “self” than the “other” that must be regained. Again, the position of Neo-Eurasianism deprives the Ukrainians from

³⁰ Referring back to Putin's words like “the greatest geopolitical tragedy of XX century”, etc;

³¹ Vladimír Naxera. "The West, Globalisation and Pussy Riot: Portrayals of Russia and Eurasia's Enemies in the Work of Aleksandr G. Dugin." *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies* 12, no. 1 (2018), 119.

³² “The Court Has Prohibited the National-Bolshevik Party of Russia [Суд Запретил НБП],” *Kommersant* [Коммерсантъ], April 19, 2007, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/998919> (in Russian).

³³ Anton Shekhovtsov, “Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian-Ukrainian War,” in *The Politics of Eurasianism*, ed. Mark Bassin and Gonzalo Pozo (New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), pp. 181-200, 194.

being “self,” denying the existence of the Ukrainian identity and oversimplifying their argument to geopolitics.

Dugin and his associates contributed to the creation of the neo-Eurasianist movement in Ukraine. Even though it was marginalized and never took part in the Ukrainian politics, it attempted to promote the ideas of Russian imperialism among Russian-speaking population of Southern and Eastern Ukraine. The idea supports the overall revanchist narrative of Russia as it premises on the vision of Russia as the Eurasian empire and even embraces the concept *Ruski mir* (Russian World). Overall, the othering of Ukraine aimed to reinforce the *Derzhavnost* of Russia and emphasize its dominant position in relation to the former Soviet countries, especially Ukraine. The idea influenced the emergence of pro-Russian attitudes in the Eastern part of Ukraine; however, it has never been an official, state-adopted ideology or foreign policy doctrine in Russia.

Nevertheless, Charles Clover argues that neo-Eurasianism could be considered as the ideological construct that developed in Russia through generations and was assembled by Dugin as a concoction, predominantly based on the Russian imperialism. Dugin was marginalized initially, but when he started teaching at the Military Academy of the General Staff, he introduced the concept of geopolitics to the military.³⁴ Dugin’s connection to the Russian elites via academy spread his visions first among the top-brass and then through the system. Neo-Eurasianism sees “Heartland” that overlaps most of the Russian territory as the actual boundaries of the empire-to-be and Ukraine has been a part of this empire for quite a considerable time. This intertwines with the opinion of Putin on the collapse of the USSR that he describes as the “greatest geopolitical tragedy of the XX century.” The idea of neo-Eurasianism undoubtedly contributes to the “othering” of Ukraine in today’s Russia. Nevertheless, it is definitely neither the main nor only source of the “othering.” The development of Russia’s historical state iterations as an authoritarian system, its inherent imperialism and conservative attitudes that were aimed to safeguard the achievements of the Russian culture are significantly more important in this regard. As a result, these exact historical features indirectly led to the emergence of neo-Eurasianism as an idea. Hence, they are vital supplements to Russia’s restrictive attitude towards Ukraine.

³⁴ Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (Yale University Press, 2017), 201-210.

4.3. “We Can Repeat!” Using Great Patriotic War Memory to Justify War Against Ukraine

In the state-controlled Russian media outlet, RIA Novosti, a disturbing article with the name “The Assault of Russia and the New World” was released two days after the war broke out, on the 26th of February. It is worth noting that article was deleted from the website the same day it was released.¹ Without going too in-depth, it chillingly started: “Vladimir Putin – without any exaggeration – took the historical responsibility in his hands, deciding not to leave the **solution of the Ukrainian question** to the next generations [of Russians?].”² The associations, attached to the “final solution to the X question,” are dreadful at the very least, as the phrasing was used in the Nazi Germany and meant the plan for the genocide, to the physical extermination of the Jewish people during WWII.³ At the same time, Putin’s regime labels Ukrainians as “neo-Nazis,” “fascists” and “military junta” – uses the discursive elements that establish a connection between the victory and current days. This contradiction is, however, not an exception but a rule for the Russian regime during the war against Ukraine. How is the use of the Nazi terminology possible in Russia, where the cult around the victory over the Nacist Germany in WWII emerged and actively promoted by the government?

The connection of two distant and evidently different historical events is, of course, man-made, artificial. It has been cultivated through the *pobedobesiye* itself. This, according to Zerubavel, is called a “bridging technique” – a way of creating “the illusion of historical continuity” through filling up the mnemonic gaps that could have left due to various historical reasons and henceforth, shorten the historical distances.⁴ In this particular case, I see a presence of two bridging techniques: discursive continuity and historical analogy. Historical analogy allows to mobilize memory when needed and

¹ “The Article About the ‘Final Solution of the Ukrainian Question’ and About ‘Returning of the Historical Place By Russia’ Has Disappeared From The RIA Novosti Website [С Сайта РИА ‘Новости’ Исчезла Колонка о ‘Решении Украинского Вопросы’ и о Возвращении Россией ‘Исторического Места’ - Новости На TJ],” TJ, February 27, 2022, <https://tjournal.ru/news/545974-s-sayta-ria-novosti-ischezla-kolonka-o-reshenii-ukrainskogo-voprosa-i-o-vozvrashchenii-rossiye-istoricheskogo-mesta?ysclid=l41egd3sxx> (in Russian).

² Pyotr Akopov, “The Assault of Russia and The New World [Наступление России и Нового Мира],” RIA Novosti [РИА Новости] (FSUE INA “Russia Today” [ФГУП МИА “Россия сегодня”], February 26, 2022), <https://web.archive.org/web/20220226072605/https://ria.ru/20220226/rossiya-1775162336.html> (in Russian). NB - web archive version, the original page was deleted by the media outlet.

³ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 140.

⁴ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 48-50.

hence, adapt the flow of history for the most urgent events. Analogies allow to ignore the temporal distance between the events because of the cultural affinity that the history retains.⁵ Discursive continuity is another technique that is particularly interesting for the observable case. It helps to present the past in a such way that would create a feeling of continuity.⁶ They help Putin to maintain historical statecraft through *pobedobesiye*.

At this point, I would like to counterargue the point of Dr. Mann from Arizona University who claimed that “(...) the cult of the Great Patriotic War undoubtedly has a shelf life that might soon reach its expiration date (...).”⁷ The war in Ukraine demonstrates how the cult of victory got its second wind and flourishes in the current context. It seems that the cult is far from its “expiration date” because the war provided it with new mnemonic connections and meanings that enhance the old ones. As it was seen in Putin’s speech, Russian regime sees the Ukrainian political system as “occupied by the neo-Nazis” and refer to the Ukrainian government as “the Banderite junta.”⁸ This is the exact result of the *pobedobesiye*: a production of historical analogies enabled to tailor the image of Nazis to the event that happens almost 80 years after the defeat of the Nazis themselves. This mnemonic bridge between two wars was created by Putin’s regime to mobilize the domestic population easier and trigger the long-absorbed war-related narratives. What is more, another bridge is the discursive continuity in a form of primitive yet easily absorbable value system in the Russian society: everyone who is against us is a **Nazi** because we are the sons of the true antifascists, the Red Army. In a way, it poses Russia as a “continuous self” and enhances a mnemonic connection, presupposing that Russia has always been in one or another form at the same time. Such a worldview promotes a dichotomic vision of the world, divided by the “us-them” principle, a simple antithesis. Ukraine dared to defend its country against the invaders, it means that Ukraine is against Russia, hence Ukraine and its leadership are “neo-Nazis.” A very provocative logic of an actual dehumanization that nevertheless has rooted in the minds of the Russian leadership and some Russians. What is more, Snyder argues that this could be even considered as a type of fascism called “schizofascism”: “actual fascists called their opponents ‘fascists,’ blaming the Holocaust on Jews, treating the Second World War as an argument for more

⁵ Ibid., p. 50.

⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

⁷ Yan Mann, “(Re)Cycling the Collective Memory of the Great Patriotic War,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 33, no. 4 (January 2020): pp. 508-513, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2020.1845080>, 513.

⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation (President of Russia, February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

violence.”⁹ He outlined that this phenomenon emerged in the Soviet times, when the Soviets propaganda “identified all enemies as fascists.”¹⁰ Back then, the Soviet enemy was fascism that originated in capitalism. After a victory over fascism, already during Brezhnev’s era in the Soviet Union (1970s), capitalism was no longer the enemy as the history was not expected to bring any more changes, as the real fascism was the existential and constant threat from the West to Russia.¹¹ Interestingly, Snyder’s argument on “schizofascism” greatly contributes to the understanding of an excessive use of “Nazi” labelling by Russia as it provides another point of view that is insightful for an analysis.

Returning to Putin’s war speech, he refers to the Great Patriotic War numerous times, making it a “usable past” for posing Ukraine as an antagonist discursively. Primarily, he compares the current defenders of Ukraine and those who struggle for its independence with Nazi Germany soldiers and Ukrainian collaborators during the WWII:

They, of course, will climb into the Crimea, and just like in the Donbas, with war, in order to kill, as **punishers** from the **gangs of Ukrainian nationalists, Hitler's accomplices**, killed defenseless people during the Great Patriotic War. They openly declare that they lay claim to a number of other Russian territories.¹²

Nonetheless, while reading alternatively, Putin’s accusation of Ukraine being a “neo-Nazi” state is used purposefully to create the picture of Ukraine’s hostility to Russia. Putin uses this artificially constructed negative Ukrainian identity representation to gain political support among the Russian masses. The years of daily usage of negative rhetoric towards Ukraine by the Russian state-backed propaganda have resulted in a creation of a strong association link between “neo-Nazis” and Ukrainian nation that makes people to justify the invasion. Besides, in the following excerpt Putin draws parallels between the Ukrainian soldiers and Nazi Germany soldiers through using the Great Patriotic War discourse:

Its goal is to protect people who have been **subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kyiv regime** for eight years. And for this, we will strive for the **demilitarization** and **denazification** of Ukraine, as well as bringing to justice

⁹ Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (Random House US, 2019), 111.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111-112.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹² Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation (President of Russia, February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

those who committed numerous, bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.¹³

This excerpt demonstrates two bridging techniques at the same time. Even though the factual correctness of Putin's words is highly questionable, it is an example of a historical analogy. While talking about "genocide", he aims to create associations with Holocaust, but now he presents the conflict in Ukraine that lasted for 8 years as the genocide against Russian-speaking citizens in Donbas. Discursive continuity is present here too, in the form of the Great Patriotic War-related wording. The words "demilitarization" and "denazification" should create associations among the Russian public with Ukraine being some kind of a *doppelgänger* of the Third Reich that was *denazified* and demilitarized as the outcome of the war. This wording is significant as it draws a picture of Russia as a successor of the USSR, that takes all the credits for liberating the world from the Nazi Germany and takes a pride for denazification of the post-war German occupied territories. The attempt is made to dehumanize Ukraine and Ukrainians to justify the war itself through historical analogy between the defeated Nazi Germany and triumphant Soviet Union that delivered the historical justice.

Besides analyzing how Russian regime portrays Ukraine, it is necessary to include how the regime projects *pobedobesiye* within the Russian society to get the public support of the war. The most interesting part of it is the use of a new symbolic, namely, "Z" and "V" letters as the symbols of support of the Russian army. It is still unknown why these letters have been chosen by the regime as they do not appear in the Cyrillic alphabet. It is interesting how in the atmosphere of the increased anti-Western discourse, the letters used to symbolize support to Russian army are taken from the Latin alphabet. The origin of the new symbols arguably lies in the Russian army – the letters were used as the tactical signs that intended to help Russians to distinguish their military vehicles from the Ukrainian ones and meant the assignment of the vehicles to the army groups "Vostok" (east), "Zapad" (west).¹⁴ Russian Ministry of Defence claimed that the symbols have no embedded meaning.¹⁵ The symbols have

¹³ Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," Official Website of the President of the Russian Federation (President of Russia, February 24, 2022), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

¹⁴ Paulina Villegas and Sammy Westfall, "How 'z' Became a Symbol for Supporting Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," The Washington Post (WP Company, March 22, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/09/letter-z-russia-symbol-pro-war/>.

¹⁵ "Russian MoD Claims That 'Z' and 'V' Symbols Are 'Not Official and Have No Embedded Meaning' [Минобороны РФ Заявило, Что Символы Z и V Не Являются Официальными и Не Несут Специальной Нагрузки]," Meduza, May 19, 2022, <https://meduza.io/news/2022/05/19/minoborony-rf-zayavilo-chto-simvoly-z-i-v-ne-yavlyayutsya-ofitsialnymi-i-ne-nesut-spetsialnoy-nagruzki>.

not been pushed by the state propaganda figures actively. However, Russia Today started to sell “Z” merchandise, calling to support the army.¹⁶ It made the symbol well-accepted among Russians and started to pop-up on their cars as stickers, as patches on clothes or backpacks, showing their solidarity with the soldiers. Some buildings in Moscow are decorated with the “Z,” children and students are being grouped in a letter to display the support of Russia,¹⁷ and some billboards show off patriotic images and slogans that tend to have “Z”. People share pictures online with various stylized slogans or quotes that contain both letters, e.g.: “Сила в правде” (the strength is in the truth), “За правду” (for the truth), “с Воиx не бросаем!” (We don’t leave our people behind), “За наших!” (lit. for our people), “За мир!” (For peace!), “Задача будет Выполнена!” (The task would be accomplished), “За наших пацанов” (For our fellaZ), to name a few (Figure 2).¹⁸ After the symbol got accepted, the Russian Ministry of Defence added a subsection at its website named “Герои Z” (the Z heroes).¹⁹

The “Z” letter is frequently bearing the colours of the St. George’s Ribbon, a symbol that is associated with the victory in the Great Patriotic War (Figure 3). Remarkably, it is another mnemonic bridge, created by Putin’s regime: by blending the symbol of the past with the symbol of today, Russia aims to establish another connection between two wars through a discursive continuity. St. George’s Ribbon was the symbol of the Soviet soldiers who fought against Nazis, whereas their grandsons fight against the “neo-Nazis” in Ukraine today, wearing a “Z”-folded ribbon.²⁰ Now, Russia’s *Rosgvardiya* (another law enforcement agency, lit. the Russian Guard) introduces a medal for the participation in the so-called “special military operation” with a letter “Z” on its averse.²¹ Coincidentally, it resembles the Soviet post-war Victory medal with the profile of Stalin and St. George’s Ribbon. Either intentionally or not, it

¹⁶ Alexey Kovalev, “‘Z’ How Russia Transformed a Letter of the Latin Alphabet into the Official (and Ominous) Symbol of Its Invasion of Ukraine,” Meduza, March 16, 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/03/16/z>.

¹⁷ “Z And Children: Manifestations of Support for the Russian Army and Lessons On the ‘Homecoming of Crimea’ [Z и Дети: в Школах и Детских Садах Проходят Акции в Поддержку Российской Армии и Уроки о ‘Возвращении Крыма’],” TJournal, March 17, 2022, <https://tjournal.ru/internet/565959-z-i-deti-v-shkolah-i-detskih-sadah-prohodyat-akcii-v-podderzhku-rossiyskoy-armii-i-uroki-o-vozvrashchenii-kryma> (in Russian).

¹⁸ For an example, see Appendix, figure 2.

¹⁹ “The “Z” Heroes [Герои Z],” Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation [Министерство Обороны РФ] (Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation [Министерство Обороны РФ], June 2, 2022), https://z.mil.ru/spec_mil_oper.htm (in Russian).

²⁰ For an example, see Appendix, figure 3.

²¹ “Rosgvardiya Introduced a Medal ‘For the Participation in a Special Military Operation’ - with the ‘Z’ Letter [Росгвардия Учредила Медаль ‘Участнику Специальной Военной Операции’ - с Буквой Z],” Meduza, June 27, 2022, <https://meduza.io/news/2022/06/27/rosgvardiya-uchredila-medal-uchastniku-spetsialnoy-voennoy-operatsii-s-bukvoy-z> (in Russian).

looks like a historical reference to the Great Patriotic War, with an exception that the medals back then were awarded after the victory, while today they are issued during the war, carrying an intention to boost morale of Russian troops too.

A very picturesque example of how Russia's newly forged symbol of identity, "Z" letter, blended with the Great Patriotic War discourse is the exhibition at the Victory Museum in Moscow, currently renamed into the *Музей Победы*.²²²³ The exhibition is called "The Ordinary Nazism," referring to the 1965 Soviet documentary "Ordinary Fascism" about Nazism at the example of the Third Reich. This is done purposely as the film is very well-known for many the Soviet people and hence, many Russians. The exhibit itself displays the "atrocities" of Ukraine and war spoils with any Nazi-related insignia that the Russians managed to find in the war-torn country as a proof of their existence. This exhibit aims to portray Ukraine as a Nacist country for the Russians, among all the other attempts to do so. Remarkably, an exhibition with the same content and intention was opened very recently in Saint-Petersburg. Its governor opened the exhibit with the expression of "proudness for the Russian soldiers, who fight against Kyiv regime's Nazis."²⁴ I assume that these exhibitions, as well as the "Z" symbol, are having the same goal: to lay the foundation to a new myth of the nation while reinforcing the existing one – the Great Patriotic War myth. It is hard to detach the war myth from the newly emerging myth, as the latter is timeline-wise and logically continues the previous myth. Today, Russia portrays itself as the nation of the successors of the legendary Red Army warriors who fought against the Nazi evil and liberated Europe, as its army is fighting against Nazis and liberates a European country, even though such a vision is highly disputable factually.

²² NB – Translation is "The Victory MuZeum."

²³ Maria Koroleva, "'Ordinary Nazism' Bizarre Exhibition at Moscow's Victory Museum Attempts to Draw Comparisons between Nazi Germany and Modern-Day Ukraine," Meduza, June 7, 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/06/07/ordinary-nazism>.

²⁴ "An Exhibition, Devoted to the Trophies of the Special Military Operation Launched In Saint Petersburg [В Петербурге Открылась Выставка Трофеев Специальной Военной Операции]," Rotonda Media [Ротонда] (Self-published, July 19, 2022), <https://t.me/rotondamedia/3717> (in Russian).

4.4. Conclusion

Putin uses ambiguous references regarding Ukraine. While referring to genocide of the Russian-speaking citizens of Donbas, he conveniently forgets the fact that it were the Russian military troops who intruded this territory and supported separatists to destabilize Ukraine.¹ He does not take into account the mass atrocities that Russian army committed in such towns as Bucha and Mariupol.² Conveniently, Putin's Russia ignores a long history of denial of the Ukrainian statehood and exclusion of their status as a separate nation, "othering" it today domestically. The sources of this process are provided above; they originate in the writings of the Russian thinkers like Ilyin in the past and Dugin today and studied by historians and political scientists. Misinformation strategy that is employed by Putin's Russia has contributed to the dissemination of hostile narratives against Ukrainians among Russians and interfered in the historical memory through adapting it to the modern days. Snyder's concept of the politics of eternity has effectively complemented the initial argument of Russia's historical statecraft as the politics of eternity are only possible when there is a complete control over the facts that in turn, are comprising the history itself. While referring to Ukraine as a "neo-Nazi" state that needs to go through "denazification" and bolstering the achievements of the Red Army in the past, it is Russian propaganda that promotes the use of "Z" and "V" letters as symbols of support of military invasion to Ukraine, creating associations with swastika to non-Russian audiences.³ It is also the Russian regime that since the beginning of the invasion started to use nuclear threats against the West. The main phrase that they use dates to 2018 when Putin said that in case of nuclear war "We (Russians) will go straight to Heaven, while they will just croak".⁴ The pro-Russian propagandists also create attitude among people that that the World War III is will break

¹ "Fact Check: Russia Falsely Blames Ukraine for Starting War: DW: 03.03.2022," Deutsche Welle (dw.com), March 3, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-russia-falsely-blames-ukraine-for-starting-war/a-60999948>.

² Dozens of Dead Civilians Found in Kyiv Suburb Russian Occupying Forces Were Driven out Just Days Ago, Leaving the Streets 'Strewn' with Dead Bodies," Meduza, April 3, 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/04/03/dozens-of-dead-civilians-found-in-kyiv-suburb>.

³ Alexey Kovalev, "'Z' How Russia Transformed a Letter of the Latin Alphabet into the Official (and Ominous) Symbol of Its Invasion of Ukraine," Meduza, March 16, 2022, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/03/16/z>.

⁴ Masha Gessen, "Inside Putin's Propaganda Machine", The New Yorker, May 18, 2022 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-communications/inside-putins-propaganda-machine>

out if Russia will suffer a military defeat against Ukraine.⁵ Both Putin and propaganda refer to the victory in GPW as the main achievement of modern Russia that every citizen must be proud of. As a result, through historical statecraft, Russian government creates the “only” historical truth and imposes a mnemonic hegemony in the sphere of historical memory. It provides a backup and legitimization of every domestic or foreign policy initiative of the Russian ruling elites. The war memory is now mobilized and employed in the current war against Ukraine to enhance meaningless and horrible acts of violence with meanings that are already absorbed and recirculate in the Russian society. In all of the aforementioned examples, one feature stands out: their artificial character. It is this artificial history that makes the current strategy of Putin’s regime a disturbing case of historical statecraft.

⁵ Ponomareva, Alya. “‘No one will let them into Heaven.’ Bloggers about the Threat of the World War Three [‘В Рай Их Никто Не Впустит’. Блогеры Об Угрозе Третьей Мировой]” Радио Свобода, April 29, 2022. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-ray-ih-nikto-ne-vpustit-blogery-ob-ugroze-tretjey-mirovoy/31826902.html>

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analyzed a variety of aspects of the politics of history of Putin's Russia. The central aim of the thesis was to answer the research question: “*How did the **historical statecraft** of **Putin’s regime** evolve from **domestic to foreign use** between **2012 and 2022?**” It is evident that Putin’s Russia selectively uses and applies history to justify the current political goals or a certain vector in foreign and domestic policy. How this works has been illustrated in reference to three mnemonic instruments: the interventions in historical memory in the examples of *pobedobesiye*, memory laws, and selective interpretations of history.*

In Chapter II, I aimed to provide more context that would let the reader understand the state of affairs in Russia and to answer the first subquestion: “*How did Putin’s vision of history develop throughout his terms?*” The first subchapter offers a history of development of modern Russia and particularly how Putin concentrated more and more power in his hands. From being somewhat distanced from history, Putin went to the point of being an amateur historian who interprets history as he needs it. The second subchapter contains an analysis and reflection on the newly emerging cult of victory, or *pobedobesiye*, the war craze. *Pobedobesiye* is the example of how the state policy in the domain of history could completely alternate the perception of a historical event and create a system of values and discourse that is evident now, during the war in Ukraine. These changes and details, mentioned in the chapter, display how Russia has been changing and how its politics changed as well. Putin’s vision of history developed in a very specific way and premises on the assumption of the greatness of Russia because of its achievements of the past, among which, the victory in the Great Patriotic War is the most important.

In Chapter III, I analyzed legal instruments of Putin’s historical statecraft. The subquestion of the chapter was “*Which legislative tools have been used by Russia for historical statecraft domestically since 2012?*” I distinguished two legislative tools that influenced historical statecraft in Russia: the 2012 Law on Foreign Agents and 2020 Constitutional Amendments. They allow the regime to be rapid enough to prevent the emergence of alternative discourses and keep the state’s mnemonic hegemony safe. The 2020 Constitutional Amendments were not only important for Putin and his regime to have the ability to be re-elected in 2024, but also crucial for studying the historical memory policy of Russia. Article 67¹ is an example of how the state aspires to control

historical memory through legislature and to create a new Russian identity, based on the long history of imperialism, traditional or conservative values, and the Great Patriotic War myth. A brief analysis displayed how the Constitution reflects the position of the state vis-a-vis historical memory and the official narrative itself. The introduction of the law on “foreign agents” was aimed to silence the opposition from the very beginning, and the use of the law intensified over time. Initially, the law was used selectively, however, over time, this law has become one of the main tools of the Kremlin in editing or intervening in the historical and political discourses in Russia. The example of Memorial demonstrated that even the oldest and most well-respected civil rights groups are under threat, while the mass use of the law after the outbreak of the war makes this law the main instrument of the state-imposed censorship in Putin’s Russia.

In Chapter IV, I reflected on the implications of the historical statecraft of Putin and how it spilled over to another country, Ukraine. This chapter answers the last subquestion: “*How Russia’s historical statecraft influenced the outbreak of the war in Ukraine?*” A prominent example of the influence of Russia’s historical statecraft on the outbreak of the war is the “othering” of Ukraine in Russia: misinterpretations of history allow Putin to construct the needed narrative and vision that in turn, would be used politically and would be absorbed by the population of Russia. To do so, Putin’s regime operates in a framework that sees Russia as a quasi-imperial entity and builds its behaviour on this vision, denying the selfness of Ukrainians. Neo-Eurasianist idea of Alexander Dugin overlaps Putin’s vision and resonates among the Russian elites. Even though Neo-Eurasianism seems like an ideology that is being employed by the regime, I highly doubt that modern Russia has any ideological construction. In fact, a key finding of the research is that Putin’s regime does not intentionally build a profound, defined ideology. Instead, the regime premises on the misinformation tactics that require flexibility. The existence of an ideology deprives regime from flexibility, making it less efficient in terms of statecraft. In contrast, the current strategy of Putin is excessively flexible and allows Russia to deny any accusations or critique through appealing to the conveniently constructed narratives.

The usage of a long-cultivated victory cult by Putin poses an example of externalization of historical statecraft that allows to see the war in Ukraine as the memory war. Russia sees the opposing side as the inherent evil, dehumanizing it and exaggerating the sentiment against Ukraine among Russians through appealing to the Great Patriotic War memory. Mnemonic bridging techniques that I defined in the actions of the Russian state help it to establish a sense of continuity among the Russians that in

turn, would increase the support of the war against Ukraine domestically. The messages that are being embedded in the overall Great Patriotic War discourse are not the ones on peaceful coexistence or a true anti-fascist stance, but on warmongering, revanchism and sacralization of the victory, making the latter a cult rather than a historical event that commemorates the past achievements. Even though the spillover effect of *pobedobesiye* was already seen in 2014 annexation of Crimea, today it has significantly more far-reaching consequences than ever before.

The implications and findings of the current dissertation aim to contribute to the discussion over Russia in the international relations and over historical statecraft as a phenomenon. With the rise of non-democratic regimes, the manipulation of history could be used by other regimes for any means, causing another spiral of tensions and violence. This dissertation displayed just of the examples how history could be employed by the state and even weaponized. It creates further implications for studying history and its connection to the international and domestic politics, as the current war is in many regards induced by historical statecraft. Further observation of historical statecraft would help predicting the emergence of such tendencies and improving the quality of political analysis or analytical work.

6. Bibliography

6.1. Literature

- Applebaum, Anne. *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*. Toronto, ON: Signal, 2018.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. Verso Books, 2016.
- Arbatova, Nadezhda. "Three Faces of Russia's Neo-Eurasianism." *Survival* 61, no. 6 (2019): 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1688562>.
- Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 19-21.
- Bassin, Mark, Gonzalo Pozo, and Anton Shekhovtsov. "Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian-Ukrainian War." Chapter. In *The Politics of Eurasianism: Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's Foreign Policy*, 181–200. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017.
- Baunov, Aleksander. "The Fear of Perestroika-2. Why Putin Refused from Complex Schemes for Power Transition? [Страх Перестройки-2. Почему Путин Отверг Сложные Схемы Трансфера Власти]." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 29, 2020. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/2020/04/29/ru-pub-81670> (in Russian).
- Clark, William A. "Presidential Power and Democratic Stability under the Russian Constitution: A Comparative Analysis." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1998): 620–37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551905>.
- Clover, Charles. *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism*. Yale University Press, 2017.
- Cherviatsova, Alina. "Memory as a battlefield: European memorial laws and freedom of speech." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25, no. 4 (2021): 675-694.
- Daucé, Françoise. "The Duality of Coercion in Russia: Cracking down on 'Foreign Agents'." *Demokratizatsiya* 23, no. 1 (2015): 60–64. <https://doi.org/https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A401904587/ITOF?u=erasmus&sid=bookmark-ITOF&xid=83af4405>.

- Daucé, Françoise. "The Government and Human Rights Groups in Russia: Civilized Oppression?" *Journal of Civil Society* 10, no.3 (2014): 239-254, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2014.941087>
- Dugin, Aleksandr. *The Foundation of Geopolitics: A Geopolitical Future of Russia [Основы Геополитики: Геополитическое Будущее России]*. Moscow: "Arktogeia", 1997.
- Dugin, Aleksandr. *The Fourth Political Theory*. London, London: Arktos, 2012.
- Edie, James M., James P. Scanlan, and Mary-Barbara Zeldin. *Russian Philosophy Volume I: The Beginnings of Russian Philosophy, the Slavophiles, the Westernizers*. 1. Vol. 1. 3 vols. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1976.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Language and power*. Pearson Education, 2001, 19-22
- Fedor, Julie, Markku Kangaspuro, Jussi Lassila, and Zhurzhenko Tat'iana. *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Gaaze, Konstantin, "Why Russia's Crimean Consensus is Over (And What Comes Next)." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 21, 2018. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/77310>
- Gerring, John. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Guriev, Sergei M. and Treisman, Daniel. "How Modern Dictators Survive: Cooptation, Censorship, Propaganda, and Repression," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, April 2015, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2571905>
- Hall, Stuart. "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 1996, pp. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907.n1>.
- Hoffmann, David L., and Elizabeth A Wood. "Performing Memory and Its Limits." Chapter. In *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, 249–75. Abingdon: Routledge, 2022.
- Ioffe, Julia "What Russia's Latest Protests Mean for Putin." *The Atlantic*, March 27, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/03/navalny-protests-russia-putin/520878/>
- Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014).
- Kayes, Jamie Barlowe. "Reading against the Grain: The Powers and Limits of Feminist Criticism of American Narratives." *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 19, no. 1 (1989): 130–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225240>.

- Kattan, Victor. "Big Brother v. Little Brother: A Critical Analysis of Russian President Putin's Legal Justifications for Russia's Preventive War in Ukraine", *Jurist*, March 18, 2022, <https://www.jurist.org/commentary/2022/03/victor-kattan-russia-ukraine-legal-justifications/>
- Koposov, Nikolay. *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Koposov, Nikolay. "'The Only Possible Ideology': Nationalizing History in Putin's Russia," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 24:2, September 2021, DOI: 10.1080/14623528.2021.1968148, 205-215, 215.
- Kuzio, Taras. *Putin's War against Ukraine: Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime*. North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, an Amazon.com Company, 2017.
- Kuzio, Taras. *Russian Nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian War Autocracy-Orthodoxy-Nationality*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2022.
- Leafstedt, Ellen N. "Foreign policy fatigue? Russian mass media agenda setting strategies and public opinion on the 2018 pension reforms." *Slovo* 34, no. 1 (2021), 10.
- Lipman, Maria. "Dissent, Its Persecutors, and the New Russia." *New Perspectives* 30, no. 1 (January 21, 2021): 6–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x211066448>.
- Malinova, Olga. "Creating meanings and traps: competing interpretations of the idea of nation in the debates of Russian Slavophiles and Westernisers in the 1840s." *European Review of History—Revue européenne d'Histoire* 15, no. 1 (2008): 41-54.
- Mann, Yan. "(Re)cycling the Collective Memory of the Great Patriotic War." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 33:4 (2020): 508-513, DOI: 10.1080/13518046.2020.1845080
- Mathison, Sandra. "Modus Operandi." *Encyclopedia of Evaluation*, January 1, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950558.n347>.
- Maximilian Mayer, "China's Historical Statecraft and the Return of History," *International Affairs* 94, no. 6 (January 2018): pp. 1222-1222, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiy209>, 1222.
- Molden, Berthold. "Resistant Pasts versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory." *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (April 2016): 125–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698015596014>.

- Nelson, Todd H. *Bringing Stalin Back in: Memory Politics and the Creation of a Useable Past in Putin's Russia*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021.
- Norris, Stephen M. "Memory for Sale: Victory Day 2010 and Russian Remembrance." *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 2011): 201–29. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187633211x589123>.
- Lamont, Christopher. *Research Methods in International Relations*. 1st ed. London: SAGE Publications, 2015.
- Lipson, Charles. *How to Write a BA Thesis: A Practical Guide from Your First Ideas to Your Finished Paper*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Orlova, Alexandra V. "Foreign Agents, Sovereignty, and Political Pluralism: How the Russian Foreign Agents Law Is Shaping Civil Society," *Penn State Journal of Law and International Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2019): 382-417. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/pensalfaw7&id=391&men_tab=srchresults
- Rizzo, Mary. "Reading against the Grain, Finding the Voices of the Detained." *Social Issues* 12, no. 1 (March 2, 2017): 26–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15596893.2017.1289779>.
- Rabow-Edling, Susanna. *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006.
- Ryabov, Andrei. "Tandemocracy in Today's Russia". *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 49, November 5, 2008: 2-7. <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD-49.pdf>
- Sasse, Gwendolyn. "Revisiting the 2014 Annexation of Crimea." Carnegie Europe. Carnegie Europe, March 15, 2017. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/03/15/revisiting-2014-annexation-of-crimea-pub-68423>.
- Shinar, Chaim. "Conspiracy Narratives in Russian Politics: From Stalin to Putin." *European Review* 26, no. 4 (2018): 648–60. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1062798718000376>.
- Smith, Christopher M. *Ukraine's Revolt, Russia's Revenge*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2022.
- Snyder, Timothy. *The Road to Unfreedom*. Random House US, 2019.
- Stallard, Katie. *Dancing on Bones: History and Power in China, Russia and North Korea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

- Stanovaya, Tatiana. "The Viral Complication. What Awaits the Russian Regime After the Quarantine [Вирусное Осложнение. Что Ждет Российский Режим После Карантина]." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 13, 2020. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/81782> (in Russian).
- Tabarovsky, Isabella. "Russia's Lost War." *Wilson Quarterly*, 2020. <https://www.wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/the-ends-of-history/russias-lost-war>.
- Van Dijk, Teun A., "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Discourse and Power* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
- Van Dijk, Teun A. "Ideological discourse analysis.", 1995, 126-127
- Wood, Elizabeth A., William E. Pomeranz, E. Wayne Merry, Maxim Trudolyubov, and E. Wayne Merry. "The Origins of Russia's War in Ukraine: The Clash of Russian and European 'Civilizational Choices' for Ukraine." Chapter. In *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine*, 27–50. Washington, D.C, Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2016.
- Zemtsov, Artyom. "'Strong Hand': Authoritarianism in the Political Culture of Modern Russians," *The Journal of Political Theory, Political Philosophy and Sociology of Politics "Politeia"* 95, no. 4 (2019): pp. 87-110, <https://doi.org/10.30570/2078-5089-2019-95-4-87-110> (in Russian).
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

6.2. Sources

- “Address by the President of the Russian Federation.” President of Russia, March 18, 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>
- “Address by the President to the Federal Assembly [Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию].” President of Russia, January 15, 2020. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62582>
- Akopov, Pyotr. “The Assault of Russia and The New World [Наступление России и Нового Мира].” *RIA Novosti [PIA Новосту]*. FSUE INA “Russia Today” [ФГУП МИА “Россия сегодня”], February 26, 2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220226072605/https://ria.ru/20220226/rossiya-1775162336.html> (in Russian).
- “Alexei Navalny Arrives in Germany for Treatment for Suspected Poisoning.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, August 22, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/21/alexei-navalny-to-be-flown-to-germany-for-suspected-poisoning-treatment>.
- “Alexei Navalny Detained at Airport on Return to Russia.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, January 17, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/17/alexei-navalny-detained-at-airport-on-return-to-russia>.
- “Anna Politkovskaya is Murdered [Убита Анна Политковская]” *Lenta.Ru*, October 7, 2006. <http://lenta.ru/news/2006/10/07/kill/> (in Russian).
- “An Exhibition, Devoted to the Trophies of the Special Military Operation Launched In Saint Petersburg [В Петербурге Открылась Выставка Трофеев Специальной Военной Операции].” *Rotonda Media [Ротонда]*. Self-published, July 19, 2022. <https://t.me/rotondamedia/3717>.
- BBC. “The State Duma: a ‘Crazy Printer’ or Russia in Miniature? [Госдума: ‘Взбесившийся Принтер’ Или Россия в Миниатюре?].” *BBC Russia*, February 28, 2013. https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2013/03/130303_duma_crazy_printer (in Russian).
- Belichenko, Gleb. “Creates a False Image of USSR as a Terrorist State.” How Did the Russian Court Prohibited ‘Memorial’? [‘Создает Лживый Образ СССР Как Террористического Государства’. Как Суд Запрещал ‘Мемориал’],” *Current Time*

- [*Настоящее Время*], December 28, 2021, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/31630069.html> (in Russian).
- Bhatia, Gurman, Prasanta Kumar Dutta, and Jon McClure. "Russia: The Latest Coronavirus Counts, Charts and Maps." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, April 15, 2022. <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/russia/>.
- Bredemeier, Ken. "NATO-Russia Talks Set on Moscow's Ukraine Border Troop Buildup." VOA, January 4, 2022. <https://www.voanews.com/a/nato-head-schedules-special-meeting-with-russia-amid-ukraine-crisis-/6381080.html>.
- "Bucharest Summit Declaration - Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008." NATO, April 3, 2008. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.
- Burton, Tara Isabella. "The Far-Right Mystical Writer Who Helped Shape Putin's View of Russia." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, May 13, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/05/12/dugin-russia-ukraine-putin/>.
- De Carbonnel Alissa, Tsvetkova Maria. "Russian Police Battle Anti-Putin Protesters." *Reuters*, May 6, 2012. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-protests-idUSBRE8440CK20120506>
- Deutsche Welle. "Gulag Historian, Activist Yuri Dmitriyev Sentenced to 15 Years." *Deutsche Welle*, December 27, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-gulag-historian-activist-yuri-dmitriyev-sentenced-to-15-years/a-60262435>.
- Deutsche Welle. "Kiriyyenko Is No Reformer in the Kremlin: DW: 08.10.2016." DW.COM. Deutsche Welle, October 8, 2016. <https://www.dw.com/en/kiriyyenko-is-no-reformer-in-the-kremlin/a-35996576>.
- Deutsche Welle. "Russia Orders Closure of Human Rights Group Memorial." *Deutsche Welle*. DW.COM, December 28, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-orders-closure-of-human-rights-group-memorial/a-60273615>.
- Deutsche Welle. "Russian Opposition Leader Alexei Navalny Sentenced to Prison." *Deutsche Welle*. DW.COM, February 2, 2021. <https://www.dw.com/en/russian-opposition-leader-alexei-navalny-sentenced-to-prison/a-56412686>.
- "Ekaterina Schulman Is Labelled as 'Foreign Agent' For Her Salary at EchoMoscow Radiostation and at Shaninka School: OVD [Екатерину Шульман Признали 'Иноагентом' Из-За Зарплаты На 'Эхо Москвы' и в Шанинке: ОВД]." OVD-Info.

- OVD-Info, June 16, 2022. <https://ovd.news/express-news/2022/06/08/ekaterinu-shulman-priznali-inoagentom-iz-za-zarplaty-na-eho-moskvy-i-v>.
- Elder, Miriam. "Vladimir Putin: 'We have won. Glory to Russia'." *The Guardian*, March 4, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/04/vladimir-putin-won-russia>
- "Federal Law "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation Concerning the Appointment and Payment for Pensions" [Федеральный Закон "О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации по вопросам значения и выплаты пенсий"]." Russian Federation, October 10, 2018. https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_308156/#dst0 (in Russian).
- Gessen, Masha. "The Russian Memory Project That Became an Enemy of the State." *The New Yorker*, January 6, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-russian-memory-project-that-became-an-enemy-of-the-state>.
- "General Conditions of the Federal Law FZ-121 [Общие Положения: Минюст России]," Ministry of Justice of Russia [Минюст России] (The Government of the Russian Federation, December 14, 2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20131214031909/http://minjust.ru/ru/node/2715> (in Russian).
- "'He Is Not Our Tzar,' the Outcomes: One-and-a-Half Thousand Protesters Detained, Record Fines, Secret Trials, and One Criminal Case [‘Он Нам Не Царь’, Последствия: Полторы Тысячи Задержанных, Рекордные Штрафы, Тайные Суды и Одно Уголовное Дело (За Якобы Выбитый у Полицейского Зуб)]." *Meduza*, May 7, 2018. <https://meduza.io/feature/2018/05/07/on-nam-ne-tsar-posledstviya-poltory-tysyachi-zaderzhannyh-rekordnye-shtrafy-taynye-sudy-i-odno-ugolovnoe-delo-za-yakoby-vybityy-u-politseyskogo-zub>.
- Higgins, Andrew. "Aleksei Navalny Hospitalized in Russia in Suspected Poisoning." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, August 20, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/20/world/europe/navalny-poison-russia.html>.
- "Igor Sechin: Rosneft's Kremlin Hard Man Comes out of the Shadows." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, October 18, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/oct/18/igor-sechin-rosneft-kremlin-hard-man-shadows>.
- "Ilya Yashin and Maxim Katz Are Considered 'Foreign Agents' [Илью Яшина и Максима Каца Объявили 'Иностранцами']." *Meduza*. Meduza, July 22, 2022.

<https://meduza.io/news/2022/07/22/ilyu-yashina-i-maksima-katsa-ob-yavili-inostrannymi-agentami>.

Ivan Kolpakov, "Meduza Is a 'Foreign Agent' Now. What's next? Spoiler: We Don't Know," *Meduza*, April 26, 2021, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2021/04/26/meduza-is-a-foreign-agent-now-what-s-next>.

Kireev, Alex. "Russia. Legislative Election 2011." *Electoral Geography 2.0*. <https://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/r/russia/russia-legislative-election-2011.html>

Kurlov, Andrey. "Ukraine's Revolution: Making Sense of a Year of Chaos." *BBC News*. BBC, November 21, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30131108>

"Kremlin Calls the Victory Day 'Sacred' for the Russians [В Кремле Назвали День Победы Сакральным Для Россиян]." *RIA Novosti [РИА Новости]*. FSUE INA "Russia Today" [ФГУП МИА "Россия сегодня"], May 7, 2022. <https://ria.ru/20220506/pobeda-1787190332.html> (in Russian).

Levada-Center. "Dynamics of Attitude Towards Stalin [Динамика Отношения к Сталину]." Левада-Центр, April 19, 2019. <https://www.levada.ru/2019/04/16/dinamika-otnosheniya-k-stalinu/> (in Russian).

"Message from the President to Federal Assembly [Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию]." President of Russia, December 12, 2012. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118>

"Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation [Министерство Юстиции Российской Федерации]." Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation. Government of the Russian Federation, August 4, 2022. <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/documents/7755/>.

"Navalny and Udaltsov Detained at 'indefinite festives' [Навальный и Удальцов задержаны на "бессрочных гуляниях"]". *BBC News Russia*, May 7, 2012. https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2012/05/120507_detention_inauguration_moscow (in Russian).

"New Text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation with 2020 Amendments [Новый Текст Конституции РФ с Поправками 2020]," The State Duma [Государственная Дума] (Government of the Russian Federation, July 3, 2020), <http://duma.gov.ru/news/48953/>, Article 67.1 (in Russian).

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Accountability for Killings in Ukraine from January 2014 to May 2016." *United Nations Human Rights*, July 14, 2016,

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/UA/OHCHRThematicReportUkraineJan2014-May2016_EN.pdf.

“Opposition Figure Navalny 'Poisoned': The Latest News.” *The Moscow Times*. The Moscow Times, August 24, 2020.

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/08/22/opposition-figure-navalny-poisoned-the-latest-news-a71207>.

“Photos of Russians Voting in Unusual Places Are All over Social Media - Don't Worry Though, It's Legal.” *Meduza*, June 25, 2020.

<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/06/25/photos-of-russians-voting-in-unusual-places-are-all-over-social-media-don-t-worry-though-it-s-legal>.

Pobedobesiye [Победобесие], May 8, 2018. <https://pobedobesie.info/>.

Ponomareva, Alya. “‘Nobody Will Let Them Into Heaven.’ Bloggers About a Threat of WWII. [‘В Рай Их Никто Не Впустит’. Блогеры Об Угрозе Третьей Мировой.]” *Radio Liberty* [Радио Свобода]. April 29, 2022. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-ray-ih-nikto-ne-vpustit-blogery-ob-ugroze-tretjey-mirovoy/31826902.html>.

“Profile: Mikhail Khodorkovsky”, *BBC News*. BBC, December 22, 2013.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-12082222>

“Profile: Ukraine’s Ousted President Viktor Yanukovich.” *BBC News*. BBC, February 28, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25182830>

“Putin Calls the Memory on the Great Patriotic War ‘Sacred’ [Путин Назвал Священной Память о Великой Отечественной Войне].” *RosBusinessConsulting* [РБК], June 22, 2020. <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5ef063369a79478274c786a7>.

Putin, Vladimir. “Address by President of the Russian Federation.” President of Russia, February 24, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>.

Putin, Vladimir. “Congratulations on Security Agency Worker's Day.” President of Russia, December 20, 2021. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67387>.

Putin, Vladimir. “Military Parade on Red Square.” President of Russia. President of Russia, May 9, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57436>.

Putin, Vladimir. “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.” President of Russia, July 12, 2021. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

Putin, Vladimir. “The President's Address to the Federal Assembly of Russia [Послание Президента Федеральному Собранию].” The Website of the President of Russia [Сайт Президента России]. The President of Russia [Президент России], January 15, 2020. <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62582> (in Russian).

- Putin, Vladimir. "Victory Parade on Red Square." President of Russia, May 9, 2022.
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68366>.
- "Putin: Russia Helped Yanukovich to Flee Ukraine." *BBC News*. BBC, October 24, 2014.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29761799>.
- "Putin Salutes Russia's Intelligence Agencies on National 'Spies' Day'." *The Guardian*.
Guardian News and Media, December 20, 2015.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/20/putin-salutes-russias-intelligence-agencies-on-national-spies-day>.
- "Putin: Soviet Collapse a 'Genuine Tragedy'," *NBCNews.com*. NBC Universal News Group,
April 25, 2005. <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna7632057>.
- "Putin Compared the Current Era with the Times of Peter the Great [Путин Сравнил Нынешнюю Эпоху Со Временами Петра I]." *RIA Novosti* [РИА Новости]. FSUE INA "Russia Today" [ФГУП МИА "Россия сегодня"], June 14, 2022.
<https://ria.ru/20220609/petr-1794337144.html> (in Russian).
- "Rosgvardia Introduced a Medal 'For the Participation in a Special Military Operation' - with the 'Z' Letter [Росгвардия Учредила Медаль 'Участнику Специальной Военной Операции' - с Буквой Z]." *Meduza*, June 27, 2022.
<https://meduza.io/news/2022/06/27/rosgvardiya-uchredila-medal-uchastniku-spetsialnoy-voennoy-operatsii-s-bukvoy-z>.
- Rosenberg, Steve. "Russian Election: Biggest Protests since Fall of USSR." BBC,
December 10, 2011. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16122524>.
- "Russia: Gulag Historian, Activist Yuri Dmitriyev Sentenced to 15 Years," *Deutsche Welle*,
December 27, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-gulag-historian-activist-yuri-dmitriyev-sentenced-to-15-years/a-60262435>.
- "Russia: Police Detain Thousands in Pro-Navalny Protests." *Human Rights Watch*. HRW,
January 26, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/25/russia-police-detain-thousands-pro-navalny-protests>.
- "Russia Election: Hundreds Rally against Putin in Moscow." *BBC News*. BBC, December 5,
2011. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16042797>
- Russian Government, "THE FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN
FEDERATION", Moscow, July 12, 2008.
https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf
- "Russian MoD Claims That 'Z' and 'V' Symbols Are 'Not Official and Have No Embedded
Meaning' [Минобороны РФ Заявило, Что Символы Z и V 'Не Являются
Официальными и Не Несут Специальной Нагрузки']." *Meduza*, May 19, 2022.

<https://meduza.io/news/2022/05/19/minoborony-rf-zayavilo-cto-simvoly-z-i-v-ne-yavlyayutsya-ofitsialnymi-i-ne-nesut-spetsialnoy-nagruzki>.

“Russian Politicians and Journalists about the Happenings in Kiev [Российские Политики и Журналисты о Событиях в Киеве].” *The Village*, February 20, 2014.

<https://www.the-village.ru/city/quotes/139395-maydan-v-blogah-rossiyskih-politikov-i-zhurnalistov> (in Russian).

“Russia's Justice Ministry Designates OVD-Info and Mediazona as 'Foreign Agents',” *Meduza*, September 29, 2021, <https://meduza.io/en/news/2021/09/29/russia-s-justice-ministry-designates-ovd-info-and-mediazona-as-foreign-agents>.

“Russia's Putin Wins Referendum on Constitutional Reforms.” *Deutsche Welle*, July 2, 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-putin-wins-referendum-on-constitutional-reforms/a-54018337>.

Sborov, Afanasiy. “The Parade with Disruptions [Парад с Перебоями].” *Kommersant [Коммерсантъ]*, May 15, 2011. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1638990> (in Russian).

Shpilkin, Sergey. “The Math of Elections – 2011 [Математика Выборов – 2011].” *TRV-science*, N 94: 2-4. <http://trv-science.ru/2011/12/matematika-vyborov-2011/> (in Russian).

“Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy”, President of Russia, February 10, 2007. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

“St. George's Ribbon.” *The European Times News*, May 11, 2022. <https://www.europeantimes.news/2022/05/st-georges-ribbon>.

Surzhko Harned, Lena. “Holy Wars: How a Cathedral of Guns and Glory Symbolizes Putin's Russia.” *The Conversation*, June 5, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/holy-wars-how-a-cathedral-of-guns-and-glory-symbolizes-putins-russia-176786>.

Talmazan, Yuliya. “Russian TV Jokes about Missiles Hitting London as Putin's Propaganda Reaches a New Level.” *NBCNews.com*. NBCUniversal News Group, May 14, 2022. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-tv-jokes-nuclear-missiles-london-putin-propaganda-ukraine-war-rcna28067>.

“Tereshkova proposed to reset the presidential term limits of Putin [Терешкова предложила обнулить президентские сроки Путина].” *Vedomosti*, March 10, 2020. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2020/03/10/824795-tereshkova-predlozhila> (in Russian).

“The Article About the ‘Final Solution of the Ukrainian Question’ and About ‘Returning of the Historical Place by Russia’ Has Disappeared From The RIA Novosti Website [С Сайта РИА ‘Новости’ Исчезла Колонка о ‘Решении Украинского Вопросы’ и о Возвращении Россией ‘Исторического Места’].” *TJournal*, February 27, 2022. <https://tjournal.ru/news/545974-s-sayta-ria-novosti-ischezla-kolonka-o-reshenii-ukrainskogo-voprosa-i-o-vozvrashchenii-rossiey-istoricheskogo-mesta?ysclid=l41eqd3sxx> (in Russian).

“The Court Has Prohibited the National-Bolshevik Party of Russia [Суд Запретил НБП].” *Kommersant [Коммерсантъ]*, April 19, 2007. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/998919>.

The Constitution of the Russian Federation, December 25, 1993. <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>.

The Moscow Times, “Rights Group Memorial Declared ‘Foreign Agent’ (for Criticizing Law about ‘Foreign Agents’),” *The Moscow Times*. The Moscow Times, October 4, 2016), <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/10/04/human-rights-group-memorial-declared-foreign-agent-for-criticizing-law-about-foreign-agents-a55588>.

“The ‘Z’ Heroes [Герои Z]” Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation [Министерство Обороны РФ]. Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation [Министерство Обороны РФ], June 2, 2022. https://z.mil.ru/spec_mil_oper.htm.

Troianovski, Anton, Andrew E. Kramer, and Andrew Higgins. “In Aleksei Navalny Protests, Russia Faces Biggest Dissent in Years.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, January 23, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/23/world/europe/navalny-protests-russia.html>.

“Valentina Tereshkova Proposed to Review the Question over the Abolishment on Presidency Term Limitations [Валентина Терешкова Предложила Рассмотреть Вопрос о Снятии Ограничений По Числу Президентских Сроков].” The State Duma [Государственная Дума]. The Government of Russia [Правительство России], March 10, 2020. <http://duma.gov.ru/news/47995/> (in Russian).

Vesti “Лавров: Попытки Выставить Сталина Главным Злодеем Эпохи – Атака На Итоги Войны [Lavrov: Attempts to Portrait Stalin as the Main Villain of the Epoch Are an Attack on the Outcomes of WWII].” *vesti.ru*, August 30, 2021. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/2606924>.

Villegas, Paulina, and Sammy Westfall. “How ‘z’ Became a Symbol for Supporting Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine.” *The Washington Post*. WP Company, March 22, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/09/letter-z-russia-symbol-pro-war/>.

“Websites of ‘Dozhd’ and ‘EchoMoscow’ Are Blocked in Russia [В России Заблокировали Сайты ‘Эха Москвы’ и ‘Дождя’].” Meduza. Meduza, March 1, 2022.

<https://meduza.io/news/2022/03/01/genprokuratura-rf-potrebovala-zablokirovat-sayty-eha-moskvy-i-dozhdya>.

“‘While I am the President, this decision would not be taken’ How Putin’s Words about Raising the Retirement Age Have Changed [“Пока я президент, это решение не будет принято”. Как менялись слова Путина о повышении пенсионного возраста].” *Current Time*, August 29, 2018.

<https://www.currenttime.tv/a/29459254.html> (in Russian).

“Yeltsin Resigns; In Boris Yeltsin’s Words: ‘I Have Made a Decision’”. *New York Times*.

January 1, 2000. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/01/world/yeltsin-resigns-in-boris-yeltsin-s-words-i-have-made-a-decision.html>

“Z And Children: Manifestations of Support for the Russian Army and Lessons On the ‘Homcoming of Crimea’ [Z и Дети: в Школах и Детских Садах Проходят Акции в Поддержку Российской Армии и Уроки о ‘Возвращении Крыма’].” *TJournal*,

March 17, 2022. <https://tjournal.ru/internet/565959-z-i-deti-v-shkolah-i-detskih-sadah-prohodyat-akcii-v-podderzhku-rossiyskoy-armii-i-uroki-o-vozvrashchenii-kryma>.

7. Appendix



Figure 1. Putin at the 2015 Immortal Regiment march, Moscow. Note St. George's Ribbons on Putin and people around. Retrieved from meduza.io through Adobe Creative Commons license.



Figure 2. The example of pictures, shared by people online. They have the slogans mentioned above, both "Z" and "V" letters and one of "Z"s is in the St. George's Ribbon colours. Source unknown, 2022.



Figure 3. A man wears a Z-folded St. George's Ribbon during May 9 celebrations, 2022. The word "Victory" is in the background. Retrieved from meduza.io through Adobe Creative Commons license.