Putin at the battle of the history:

Construction of Russian national identity in the context of Russian-Ukrainian conflict

A Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis explores the construction of Russian national identity in the speeches of President Putin, in the context of the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and how these constructions are transmitted through television. The study engages with the concepts of "imagined communities" as proposed by Benedict Anderson, Identity Theory as understood by Wodak et al., and the concept of Critical Geopolitics as proposed by O' Tuathail. The research employs a combination of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Analysis, to examine the question: How is Russian national identity constructed in Putin's speeches and how is it projected by the First Channel?

To my Ukrainian friends: Inna, Vikusya, Marusya, Svetik, Sashka.

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A state always calls itself fatherland when it is ready for murder

Friedrich Durrenmatt

1. Introduction

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has its roots in the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. This action, which was widely condemned by the international community, was justified by the Russian government as a response to the pro-Western sentiments of the Ukrainian people following the overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Kyiv, known as "Maidan." Since then, the conflict has escalated into a full-blown war, which affected not only Russia and Ukraine but the whole world.

This war is shocking in many ways. Destroyed cities, thousands of dead, and millions of refugees spread all over the world. But what was even more shocking for me, as a Russian myself, is how many of my compatriots supported this invasion. According to Levada-center, in March 2022, 52 per cent of respondents answered "Definitely yes" and 28 per cent "Rather yes" to the question "Do you personally support the actions of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine?"[1] Putin's approval rating has shown a significant increase of around 20 per cent both after the annexation of Crimea and after the start of the "special operation."[2]

While surveys are abstract and dry, personal stories are more striking. My friend's husband fled to Vietnam to escape from mobilisation. When he called his mother to let her know that he has left and is safe, her reaction was: "But who is going to fight the war?!"

This is a striking example of what Saner (1986, in Wodak et al, 2009) calls "cultural overidentification." He warns about the danger of it, as it can be manifested in oversocialization of entire groups of people under the influence of charismatic leaders and ideologies. Saner argues for the importance of distancing from identity in order to avoid such overidentification and "remain a real person" (Saner 1986, in Wodak et al, 2009, p. 17).

Though propaganda, certainly, plays a key role in forming public opinion in Russia, I believe that to be accepted as truth, it has to resonate with the national identity. I also believe that national identity can be constructed and promoted by authorities to support the official agenda. Though this thesis is not directly engaging with the war, it aims to explore how the

[1] https://www.levada.ru/en/2022/04/11/the-conflict-with-ukraine/
[2] https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/

national identity is constructed in the context of Russian-Ukrainian relationships in order to provide Russians with a framework for making sense of the invasion.

Many researchers engaged with the question of Russian national identity. Perhaps, one of the most interesting and relevant inquiries was done by Russian-American political scholar Gulnaz Sharafutdinova who links Putin's popularity and the national identity, offered by him. In her book "The Red Mirror" (2020) she argues that one of the important pillars of Putin's identity politics is the "trauma" of the 1990s, one of the most turbulent periods of Russian history when the country had to reinvent itself after the collapse of Soviet Union. In this victimhood frame, Russia is pictured as torn apart by capitalists, sinking into poverty and crime, and Putin is presented as the one who saved her. He overturned the sense of humiliation and shame, provoked by the USSR collapse and "perestroika" into a sense of pride and patriotism by drawing on the two key aspects of the Soviet identity - exceptionalism and the belief in the foreign threat. Sharafutdinova believes that the nostalgia for the Soviet past and Stalin's mythologization is not accidental but predetermined by the logic of Putin's political system. The image of Stalin as a strong leader who built and united the country reverberates with the image of Putin as the one who saved Russia from the demise of the 90s.

Goble (2016) sees Russian identity as weak and fragmented and argues that the emergence of a supra-national non-ethnic Russian identity has faced challenges, caused by many factors. A strong grassroot national identity could not form because it requires a civil society, which is not developed in Russia. In a post-Soviet multinational and multicultural country, a single ethnic identity is not possible, and regional and ethnic identities are important to people. The state's efforts to offer a civic identity, according to Akhmetov (in Goble, 2016) are not very successful. Moscow is pushing for a single, unified identity and does not recognize the distinctiveness of non-Russian groups, which is perceived as a threat to their existence. The various nations within the Russian Federation have their own long histories and were not necessarily willingly absorbed into the country. In 2013, only 45% of Russian citizens identified as members of a Russian civic nation. The conceptual division between ethnic and civic identity is manifested in the existence of two separate words for a Russian: "russky" as an ethnical identity and "rossiiskiy" as a citizen of the Russian Federation.

Kseniya Kirillova (2015, in Goble, 2016) believes that the ongoing struggles surrounding the development of Russian identity can be traced back to the contrast between free and unfree societies. In free societies, individuals have the ability to change and evolve, and often possess multiple identities which can make it difficult to predict their behaviour. This diversity of identity is viewed as a threat by the Russian authorities, who seek to impose

a single, predetermined identity on the population, rather than allowing individuals to choose their own.

Though Russian identity has been studied from many angles, so far there has not been done detailed research on Presidential speeches as a source of national identity in the context of the current Russian-Ukrainian war. I believe that it can provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind identity construction and Putin’s persuasive strategy.

I see Putin’s speeches as the essence of the official ideology, but in order to reach a wider audience they need to be transmitted by media. Speaking metaphorically, the speeches are the pebbles, dropped in the lake of discourse, around which the ripple of articles, news broadcasts and political talk shows is running. In these speeches, the key ideas are articulated, and then the news media adopt and adapt them and channel them to the audience. Therefore, though the focus of my analysis is on the speeches, I find it necessary to examine how the sense of national identity is channelled through the media, namely, the TV channel The First.

The state-controlled media in Russia is one of the Kremlin's key assets, along with control over the country's fossil fuels, and the most essential weapon for controlling internal political feelings and viewpoints (Sharafutdinova, 2020). Since the Russia-Ukraine conflict elevated in 2013, Russian authorities have made a zealous effort to control the public agenda. Although even previous to the war, Russian television was regarded as lacking impartiality and being heavily skewed in favour of President Vladimir Putin's administration, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has raised these issues to a new level (Alyukov, 2022). Even though Russian television is profit-driven and primarily owned by private individuals, it is controlled by the state or a state-affiliated business elite (Vartanova, 2011). Many scholars (Alyukov, 2022; Lipman 2009, etc) agree that while the younger generation is relying on the internet while looking for information, the majority of Russians still get the news from the television, which is therefore considered a strategic element of the regime’s maintenance. According to “Messages of Russian TV. Monitoring Report 2015” by EaP Civil Society Forum, mainstream TV news programmes dedicated about a third part of their air time to covering the Russia-Ukraine conflict and were found to be biased towards the regime’s official narrative.

Following Fairclough (1995), I see language as a key factor of control and domination. “Texts as elements of social events... have causal effects – i.e. they bring about changes” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 13). Therefore I employ Fairclough’s Critical Discourse analysis and Laclau and Mouffe’s Discourse Analysis to deconstruct Presidential speeches in order to uncover the power-knowledge dynamics, which determine current Russian socio-political life and affect the views and opinions of the citizens. By doing that I aim to answer the following research question:

How is Russian national identity constructed in Putin's speeches and how is it projected by the First Channel?

Subquestion: How this constructed identity aids in the legitimization of aggression against Ukraine?

The thesis will proceed as follows. The rest of this chapter I will dedicate to reflecting on my positionality as a Russian. In chapter 2, I will provide a historical context that would allow us to situate the ongoing conflict and Putin's rhetoric. In chapter 3, I give an overview of my theoretical framework, introducing concepts of National Identity, Critical geopolitics and Nationalism. Chapter 4 engages with the methodological approach and touches upon the limitations of this research. Chapter 5 contains a Critical Discourse Analysis of the speeches and news items. In chapter 6, I apply Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis and discuss the results of my analysis. Finally, chapter 7 is concluding the thesis.

Positionality

I don't participate in war!
The war participates in me.[3]
Yury Levitansky

As Johnson et al. (2004, p. 64) emphasise, "If we have one rule about topic choice here, it is the importance of the personal attachment to the topic itself." As a Russian, I cannot stay indifferent towards the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and as someone who condemns Russian aggression, I am dismayed by the amount of support this war gained among the Russian population. That is why I am interested in investigating the reasons behind this support.

Subjectivity is a particular challenge when working with zones of conflict. My national identity involuntarily makes me a part of this conflict, and this proximity can distort the clear vision. Therefore, I have to be aware of my biases: having a strong opinion about the situation can affect my analysis by making it one-sided. But as Donna Haraway (1988) reminds us, any knowledge comes from a viewpoint and from a specific context, and there is

[3] Translated from Russian by Natasha Gotskaya

no knowledge that is completely objective. Knowledge is always situated - not only in time and space but also in terms of values, beliefs and cultural differences. Sharafutdinova (2020) also argues that it is hardly possible to carry a completely neutral and objective analysis since the very choice of the topic is rooted in our interests, opinions and biases. Awareness of these biases is the first step to more neutral research. However, she also claims that an emotionally intelligent approach can be highly beneficial, and "experiential understanding" and empathy can be seen as valuable epistemological tools in qualitative research.

Therefore, I can see my position as advantageous, in that, as a Russian, I have a more intimate knowledge and understanding of the "Russian identity," moreover, I am also a bearer of "Russian identity", and since it is the focus of my research, this insight can be an asset. Being a Russian living in Denmark also gives me an advantage: as I am not surrounded by Russian propaganda, my analysis can gain more objectivity. Since vilifying the West is one of the key points in Putin's rhetoric, living in a Western country helps me to deconstruct these allegations. However, living in the West, makes me subject to certain negative attitudes towards Russia that I might have internalised, and I have to be aware of it as well.

Laclau and Mouffe (in Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002) acknowledge that while discourse analysis aims to distance the researcher from the discourse, there is no way to tell pure truth, for truth is always discursively constructed. The research, then, is valuable as a sort of political intervention, challenging the dominant discourses in the continuous struggle to ascribe meaning and make sense of the world. Following this approach, I will, then, see my goal in challenging the discourse of Russian identity that Putin strives to establish as dominant.

2. Historical context

A historical background of Russian-Ukrainian relations is necessary in order to understand the logic of Putin's rhetorics and examine how he is framing the historical events. Situating the discourse in a historical context is also an important part of conducting Critical Discourse Analysis.

Kyiv Rus

Kyiv Rus, a medieval East Slavic state which is usually considered the cradle of three Eastern Slav nations - Russian, Ukrainian and Belarussian, was established in the tenth century on the territory that is now modern Ukraine, Belarus and the western-European part of Russia. Traditionally, the beginning of the Rus' history and the establishment of the Rus'

state is counted from 862 AD when the Varangian (Viking) princes Rurik, Sineus and Truvor were called to rule over the local peoples in Ladoga, Izborsk and Belozero. The name of this Varangian tribe was Rus' and that gave the name to the new state. After Rurik's death, his relative prince Oleg conquered the city of Kyiv and move the capital of the young state there (Plokhy, 2010).

Another important date in the history of Rus' is 988 AD when prince Vladimir decided to be baptised into Byzantine Christianity and to make it the official religion. The Primary Chronicle, the oldest available source dated 1110, claims that he chose it because his envoys were astonished by the glamour and richness of the Byzantine churches and because Islam forbids alcohol (ibid.). However, the reasons behind it are most likely political - Byzantine Empire was a powerful ally at that time. Indeed, the baptism was one of the conditions for Vladimir's marriage to Anna, a sister of Byzantine emperors Vasily and Constantine. The conversion of Rus' territory to the new religion, however, was not a smooth process: in most of the cities it was done by force, and the rebelling pagans were prosecuted (Фроянов, 2012).

In the following centuries, the Kyiv Rus' reached its Golden Age and grew to be the biggest and most powerful in all of Europe. However, from the 12th century, the processes of fragmentation and disintegration began, and in the 13th century, Mongol Invasion destroyed the Kyiv Rus' and Mongols took control over the eastern and northern parts of the former Kyiv state (Thompson, 2013).

Due to a scarcity of reliable sources from that time, the history of this period remains obscure and uncertain, and the question of Kyiv Rus' legacy is still a battlefield for historians.

Kuzio (2006) provides a comprehensive overview of how the history of Kyiv Rus is interpreted by four major schools.

The Sovietophile and Russophile schools both see Russia as the leading East Slavic nation and claim that after the collapse of Kyiv Rus' the power and legacy were transferred to Vladimir-Suzdal, Muscovy, and the Russian empire, making them the heirs of the Rus' state. However, while the Sovietophile school to a certain extent acknowledges Ukrainians, although emphasizing that they never wanted to create an independent state but always strove to reunite with Russia, the Russophile school denies them the very existence as a separate ethnic group and sees Ukrainians as a merely regional sub-group of Russians. The ramification of this view is that the history of Kyiv Rus' is basically nationalized by Russians (ibid.).

Ukrainophile school, marginalized and oppressed during the Soviet period, in the 90s started to challenge the Sovietophile. The adherents of this school claim that since Rus' was born in geographically Ukrainian territories, it is illogical that "the elder brother" is in Moscow, a city much younger than Kyiv. They see Kyiv as the cradle of the Ukrainian nation, and claim that through its main ethnographic values, Ukrainians are the direct heirs of the

peoples of the Kyiv Rus'. "History of the Rus'," one of the seminal works in this school, argues that Russia and Ukraine developed independently and have different political cultures. This view, which gained a lot of popularity among Ukrainian politicians and intellectuals, allows for disentangling Russian and Ukrainian identities, and their past and future histories.

Finally, Eastern Slavic school is placed in between Ukrainophile and Russophile schools in that it rejects their exclusionist claims over Kyiv Rus' history. While acknowledging both nations, it sees the difference between them as blurry due to the shared periods of history, similar language and culture (ibid.).

Later period.

After the dissolution of the Kyivan state, most of those lands, which avoided the Mongolian invasion, found themselves under the control of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Plokhy (2010) argues that this period influenced producing a new type of Rus' identity inherent to those lands, which was already characterised by perceiving Muscovites and other Northern Russians as "others."

After the long period of dominance, in the middle of the 15th century, the Mongol empire began to disintegrate and weaken, which allowed the city of Moscow to rise and become a new power in the region, claiming to be a "gatherer of the Rus lands." During the reign of Ivan III and his son Vasilii III, the Muscovy state gradually got independence from the Mongols and significantly expanded its territory, absorbing and taking control over major Great Russian principalities such as Novgorod, Riazan, Pskov and others (Plokhy, 2010).

Another important date in the Russian-Ukrainian relationship is 1654 when the Pereiaslav Agreement between Muscovite boyars and Ukrainian Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky was signed. This event, or rather its interpretation, is a stumbling stone for Ukrainian and Russian scholars and politicians. In 1648 the Cossak uprising led by Khmelnytsky spread to most of the Ukrainian lands and resulted in the new Cossak state, or Hetmanate. However, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth did not want to give up on these lands and kept fighting, forcing Hetmanate to look for a strong ally. The Pereiaslav Agreement secured support from Muscovy and established the Muscovite protectorate over the Hetmanate. For Russian and Soviet historiography this event symbolized a great "reunification of Russia and Ukraine," however, some Ukrainian historians interpret it through a "lesser evil" formula or as an imperial annexation (Plokhy, 2010).

In the following years, the Hetmanate attempted to gain independence from the Russians, however, the uprisings were suppressed. In the 18th century, most of Central Ukraine and Crimea were conquered by Russian empress Catherine the Great, who introduced the policy of Russification, marginalizing Ukrainian language and oppressing Ukrainian national identity (Remy, 2007).

Russian Empire

Ivan III, who tripled the territory of Russia and ended the dominance of the Mongols, laid the foundation of the Russian Empire (Plokhy, 2010).

However, traditionally, the beginning of the Russain Empire counts from The Treaty of Nystad, a peaceful agreement, which ended the Great Northern War 1700-1721. On that day, Peter The Great accepted the title of emperor, turning Russia from a tzardom to an empire. The victory in the Great Northern War gained Russia new lands and made her an important actor on the European political scene (Агеева, 1999).

Peter's reforms significantly changed the governmental and social life of Russia. He restructured the Russian army according to European standards, built the fleet, led a cultural revolution, supported arts, and opened the first newspaper, "Vedomosti." These reforms also established an absolute monarchy, giving the emperor unlimited power. The capital was moved to Saint-Petersburg, a new city built at the Baltic shore, conquered during the North war (Геллер, 1997). Peter also established educational institutions, such as the Petersburg Academy of Science, and particularly supported geography and cartography. He commissioned Vitus Bering, a Danish explorer and cartographer and Russian Navy officer, to lead expeditions to the Northeast in order to map recently acquired territories and to figure out whether Asia and America are connected. These expeditions significantly contributed to building geographical knowledge about Siberia, the north-eastern coast of Asia and the north-western coast of America (Пасецкий, 1982).

During his reign, the idea of an All-Russian, or triune, nation, gained prominence. It claimed that the Russian nation is comprised of three sub-nations: Russians, Little Russians (Ukrainians) and Belorussian, who share a common origin in Kyiv Rus. This dogma soon became an official state ideology, supporting imperialist ambitions (Ilnytzkyj, 1996). At the same time, the official St. Petersburg Westernism was introduced, breaking the traditional way of life of Moscow Russia, based on "antiquity and duty," striving for renewal and progress and contempting the past (Мартышин, 2010).

During the reign of Peter I and his successors, the territory of the Russian Empire was extended from the Baltic Sea in the West to Alaska in the East and from the Black Sea in the South to the Arctic Ocean in the North. In the nineteenth century, control was established

also over most of Central Asia (“Russian Empire | History, Facts, Flag, Expansion, & Map,” 2022).

It is particularly interesting how this expansion was interpreted by historians and philosophers of that time. One of the most influential historians, Sergey Soloviev, claims that the growth of the Russian Empire was not at all an aggressive military conquest, unlike the Roman or Persian Empire. He was convinced that the expansion to the East was merely a colonisation of empty lands, and the few tribes inhabiting these lands were so uncivilised and politically undeveloped that conquering them was a necessity. Regarding the expansion to the West, he claimed that a great danger was arising from the Western European countries, and it was prudent to meet this danger by moving towards it and being well prepared. Soloviev’s conception is of utmost importance because from the mid-nineteen century it became the official viewpoint of Russian history (Геллер, 1997).

During the reign of Nikolai I, the official theory of Russian nationalism was proposed as an “antidote” to the ideas of liberation. It was essentialized in the triad: "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Narodnost"(Мартышин, 2010). The question about national distinctiveness was certainly not new, however, it was the first time when it was brought to the state agenda as such an elaborated concept. This theory, with very minor changes, lasted till the Revolution of 1917. The relationship between church and state in Tsarist Russia was built not according to the Western, Catholic, and then Protestant model, which is characterized by the Christian version of the separation of powers, i.e. recognition of the independence of both spiritual and secular authorities, but according to the Byzantine tradition of “symphony", the closest relationship of the two authorities (Мартышин, 2010).

Crimea

Since the motto “Crimea is ours” became so important in legitimizing the annexation, I find it necessary to provide a short account of the Crimean history and the peoples who inhabited and ruled it in different periods.

Crimea always was and still is, a melting pot of ethnicities (Kent, 2016). Crimean peninsula, surrounded by the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov and connected by the Isthmus of Perekop to mainland Ukraine, was inhabited for at least 80 000 years. During the classical period, Tauri and Scythians were the main tribes occupying the territory, and at the same period, Greeks started to establish their presence in the region. By the 6th century BC, a network of Greek colonies was spread along the coast, with Chersonesus being the most important of them. Later on, Bosporan Kingdom was established, which in the middle of the third century AD was captured by Goths (Kent, 2016).

During the early Middle Ages, Crimea was under the control of the Byzantium Empire. At the end of the 6th century AD, Crimea was partially conquered by Khazars, semi-nomadic Turkic people. In the 10th century, Kyivian princes fought Khazars and for a short time took control over the eastern part of the peninsula. Russian Prince Vladimir in 988 AD was baptised in Chersonesus. In the 13th century, Genovese colonies, lively centres of trade and commerce, were established on the southern shore. In approximately the same period, Mongol Golden Horde conquered the steppe part of Crimea. After the disintegration of the Horde, a Crimean Kahanate was established in 1441, however, soon the Ottoman Empire took control over it. At the end of the 18th century empress, Cathrine the Great defeated the Ottomans and in 1784 included Crimea in the Russian Empire, significantly increasing Russian power by gaining the access to the Black Sea. In the Soviet time, Crimean ASSR was an autonomous republic within the Russian SFSR, but in 1954 general secretary Brezhnev transferred Crimea to Ukrainian SSR. After the dissolution of the USSR, Crimea remained within Ukraine. In 2014, after the referendum arranged by the Kremlin, Crimea was annexed by Russia (Kent, 2016).

During the times of Kahanate and Ottoman rule, Crimean Tatars were the vast majority of Crimean inhabitants, and remained a significant ethnic group till the 20th century. In 1944, following the order of Joseph Stalin, ethnic cleansing of Crimean Tatars was carried out, displacing more than 220.000 of them from Crimea mostly to the Uzbek SSR and causing thousands of them to die during the deportation (ibid.).

Russian-Ukrainian War 2014-present

In 2014, taking advantage of the political instability in Ukraine after the Maidan events, Kremlin decided that it is time to return Crimea to the Russian realm. On February, 26 upheavals started in Sevastopol, allegedly provoked by a pro-Russian Crimean deputy Aksenov (Зыгарь, 2022). These protests were framed as fascist hostility towards ethnic Russians of Crimea (Dee, 2021). Following this event, Russian troops were deployed to Sevastopol, seizing the Supreme Council and the Government of Crimea. However, the soldiers were in unmarked uniforms, and Kremlin denied being involved. On February, 28, 170 men were brought to Sevastopol to participate in a pro-Russian rally pretending to be Crimeans and demanding reunification with Russia. In a matter of days, the Russian military took control of Ukrainian military bases in Crimea. On March 16, a referendum was arranged, where 96,77%, according to the Russian official data, voted for joining Russia. Although the referendum was not recognized internationally, on March 18 Putin signed a

decree on the admission of the Republic of Crimea to the Russian Federation (Зыгарь, 2022).

In 2014, the Ukrainian military successfully recaptured several cities in the Donbas region from Russian and separatist forces, causing thousands of people to be displaced and damaging infrastructure in the area. Despite attempts to negotiate a cease-fire, the conflict continued and by 2022 had resulted in over 14,000 deaths. In 2021, Russia was believed to be preparing for an invasion of Ukraine, which was confirmed when President Putin recognized the independence of the separatist-held Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Russian troops then invaded Ukraine from various locations, but their advance met resistance from Ukrainian forces. Putin sought to justify the invasion by claiming that Ukrainian forces were committing genocide against Russians in Donbas, but the invasion caused more harm and suffering than the previous eight years of conflict, including the destruction of cities like Mariupol, which was always pro-Russian, through indiscriminate artillery strikes (Donbas | Map, Region, Ukraine, & War, 2022).

The conflict has been the subject of much international attention, with various countries and international organizations expressing concern over Russia's actions and calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. As the responce to the invasion, the US and EU imposed sanctions on Russia (BBC News, 2022).

3. Theoretical framework

National Identity

> *“We should think of the nation not only as a political entity but also as something that produces meaning and constructs identification…” (Hall, 2017, p. 137).*

The concept of national identity is a centrepiece of my research, therefore it deserves a detailed theoretical grounding. Wodak et al. (2009) in their research on Austrian national identity draw on a wide set of identity theories, offering a comprehensive and nuanced approach, which I find extremely productive in relation to my research.

Wodak et al. (2009) understand **national identities** as particular forms of social identities that are discursively produced and reproduced. National identity includes a complex of similar *emotional attitudes and dispositions*, shared *beliefs and opinions*, and

similar collectively shared *behavioural conventions*, which the bearers of this national identity internalise through socialization. The shared emotional dispositions are the attitudes towards fellow in-group members (solidarity) as well as the outgroup members ("othering"). "Sameness" and "difference" are therefore backbone categories for national identity.

The practice of national identification is driven by stressing "national uniqueness," which is a relational term and a special form of difference. By lifting individuality at the national level, the state actors promote a homogenous, uniform sense of identity, disregarding intra-national differences. National uniqueness, always assigned with only positive attributes, offers a possibility to compensate for the unfulfilled desire for personal uniqueness. As Schopenhauer (1989, p. 429, in Wodak et al., 2009, p. 27) puts it, national pride is "the most inexpensive type of pride." A faith-related identifying connection to "collective memory" is another factor, motivating people to accept and reproduce a discursively constructed national identity. Following Anderson, Wodak et al. also see a nation as an imagined community, and while it is an imaginary complex of ideas, it is real to the extent that one believes in it and identifies with it emotionally.

National identity "is shaped by state, political, institutional, media and everyday social practices, and the material and social conditions which emerge as their results, to which the individual is subjected" (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 29). Discursive practice understood as a type of social practice plays a key part in the formation and maintenance of national identity.

Wodak et al. (2009) argue that *one* static national identity does not exist: various identities are discursively constructed depending on the context, which makes them relational, fragile, ambiguous and diffuse. Identities are never static, they are always situated in a process.

Furthermore, there are *multiple identities*. This concept refers to the idea that a person belongs to more than just one social group and stresses the hybridity of both individual and collective identities, dismantling the idea of a "pure," homogenous identity. The overlapping of these multiple social identities offers a potential corrective element to the practices of differentiation and exclusion by eliminating certain lines of conflict. Cultural overidentification, when one identity starts to dominate and be overemphasised, is, on the contrary, extremely dangerous, according to Saner (1986, in Wodak et al, 2009), leading, for example, to situations when people fall under the influence of an ideology. I find this idea useful because it speaks to Laclau and Mouffe's idea of the subject's overdetermination and offers a view on national identity politics as aiming to make the national identity dominant.

Ricoeur's (1992) concept of *narrative identity*, adopted by Wodak et al. (2009) offers an understanding of a person as a narrative figure, a character, drawing their identity on the identity of the story's plot and channelling it in the form of a narrative. Narrative identity is at the same time imagined and real, allowing for rearrangement and reinterpretations of

events of the past and initiatives in the future, and giving meaning to one's practice. Nationality can be seen as a narration too, it is a story told by people to make sense of the social world.

Poole (1999, in Langman, 2006) claims that national identity establishes itself as embedded in moral order and draws on the values that resonate with the members of the nation, providing meaning, informing and underlying other identities, and striving to take priority over them in a case of a conflict. Nation, as an overarching moral order and a superior identity, can then demand from its people to put the national interest before the individual and expects its subjects to willingly sacrifice their lives for the sake of the country.

According to Baumeister (1992, in Langman, 2006), feelings of dignity, agency, purpose and value are essential for people in order to understand their lives as meaningful. A national self-identity offers the possibility for such gratifications. Nationalism sees the nation as sacred as it transcends the individual life.

At the content level, there are certain key areas, which serve as building blocks of national identity. Various scholars propose overlapping, but slightly different sets of elements of national identity. According to Stuart Hall (1996, in Wodak et al., 2009), nation narration consists of five fundamental elements: *the narrative of the nation*; emphasis on *origins, timelessness, continuity and tradition; the invention of tradition; the foundational myth (or myth of origin), and the idea of "pure, original people."* Leszek Kolakowski (1995, in Wodak et al., 2009) identifies *the idea of national spirit; historical memory; anticipation and future orientation; national body, and namable beginning*.

I believe that since national identity is dynamic, different elements in different proportions would crystallize in each articulation depending on the context. Wodak et al. (2009), drawing on the elements proposed by Hall and Kolakowski, develop their own thematic matrix that serves to structure the analysis. Following their approach, after a pilot analysis of my data, I identified the following elements, which in different proportions, constitute Russian national identity in Putin's speeches:

1. The people, or mythical "We"
2. Common past, including historical memory and myth of origins
3. National body, (boundaries and national territory)
4. Trauma
5. The Other/The threat

Nationalism

Concepts of national identity and nationalism are tightly intertwined. Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" (2006) is a seminal work in the study of nationalism, and it is especially valuable for my research since it understands a nation as a social construct and explores the forces and inherent logic behind this construction.

Anderson (2006, p.3) points out that while "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value" in contemporary politics, it is extremely difficult to define and analyse nationality, nation and nationalism. He sees nationality, or nation-ness, and nationalism as specific types of cultural artefacts. To completely comprehend them, we must carefully explore their historical genesis, the manner in which their meanings have evolved through time, and the reasons for their current profound emotional validity. Anderson understands the creation of these artefacts as the result of a combination of various historical influences.

He proposes the following definition of the **nation**: "it is an *imagined political community* - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign"(Anderson, 2006, p. 6). It is understood as *imagined* because the members of this community will never know most of their compatriots, however, they have the feeling of a strong emotional connection with them based on the image of their union. It is *limited* because even the biggest nations have finite boundaries separating them from other nations. It is *sovereign* because the concept originated during a time when the authority of the hierarchical, dynastic, divinely decreed world had been undermined by the Enlightenment and Revolution. Nations craved freedom, and the sovereign state served as a barometer and a symbol of this freedom. Finally, it is a *community* because the country is always viewed as a profound, horizontal fellowship, despite the actual inequality and exploitation that may exist. Importantly, this sense of brotherhood is this drive that motivates millions of people to kill and die for their imagined community.

This willingness to die is embodied in the cenotaphs and monuments of the Unknown Soldier, the most striking symbol of contemporary nationalism. While most of them are empty of the actual physical remains, they are filled with ghostly national imaginings. The ceremonial reverence for such monuments has no real precedents in earlier periods. Anderson suggests that nationalist imagination and religious imagination have a close relationship and proposes to think about death as one of the cultural foundations of nationalism (ibid.).

Anderson points to three paradoxes inherent to nationalism. First, it is the objective historical modernity of the nations vs. the subjective antiquity of them perceived by

nationalists. Second, nationality as a universal sociocultural concept in the modern world vs. inevitable particularities of its specific expressions. Third, nationalism's "political" power vs. lack of depth and coherence in their philosophical foundations (ibid.).

Anderson believes that the cultural roots of nationalism is what gives it such a profound emotional legitimacy. He proposes that nationalism should be understood in connection with large cultural systems, out of which (and against which) it was born: religious community and dynastic realm. While the power of the religious belief and church was declining, Enlightenment and rationalist secularism that took its place could not fill the void and provide answers to the eternal questions of continuity and suffering. The idea of nation was the answer, providing the secular conversion of fatality into continuity. While nation-states are relatively new, the nations that they represent tend to look back at their past and towards an infinite future. "It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny" (Anderson, 2006, p. 12). Anderson, however, warns us against thinking about the imagined communities of nations as barely substitutes for the dynastic realms and religious communities.

Anderson sees the emergence of the nation as an imagined community as closely tied to the rise of print capitalism. With the advent of the printing press and the mass production of books, pamphlets, and newspapers, people were able to read and write about the same events and ideas, creating a sense of shared experience and collective identity. He also emphasises the role of language in shaping national identity. He argues that the use of a common language, especially in the form of print media, is crucial for creating a sense of national belonging. The emergence of written language and print invented nationalism.

Despite the fact that the nation is an imagined community, Anderson (2006) argues that it has real consequences for the lives of its members. Nation shapes people's identities, influences their political beliefs, and even affects the way they think about their own history.

Armstrong (1982, p.5) argues that the national group identifies itself not by reference to their own features but by exclusion, that is, by comparison to "strangers," and this is how the symbol of the country is constructed and repeated. To put it another way, nationalism creates national identity via antagonism with an Other, making the boundary (rather than the centre) the place where identity is located.

External threat (or an illusion of external threat) has a profound influence on nationalism: by realizing that they are threatened because of who they are, people are forced to acknowledge that they can defeat this threat only as one united nation (Herbst, 1990).

Langman (2006) thinks that the ability to offer identity, based on the irrational and emotional, is what the power of nationalism is based on. Nationalism, as fidelity to one's compatriots, is interwoven with individual passions and desires, leading people to willingly sacrifice for the good of the nation.

Russian Nationalism

Russian nationalism is a multifaceted and complicated phenomenon. Russian political scientist Emil Pain (Паин, 2015) argues that a blend of Russian nationalism and imperial consciousness contributed to the formation in Russia of a particular phenomenon that can be called "imperial nationalism." This term sounds contradictive, at least for the Western scientific tradition, which more often considered nationalism as one of the factors opposing the empire and destroying the imperial structure. In Russian conditions, however, (although not only in them), there is a phenomenon of imperial nationalism that supports imperial goals.

Pain points to a phenomenon of the "reverse wave," as a process of nostalgia and political reaction. This phenomenon can be observed in modern Russia in the form of "**imperial syndrome**." It includes three key elements: the "imperial order" (or "imperial power"), aiming to govern and preserve the "imperial body" - the territory of the country; and "imperial consciousness," which includes a complex set of stereotypes inherent to mass consciousness. Those stereotypes in the Russian context are the "vassal consciousness", hopes for a "wise czar" and a "strong hand", as well as imperial ambitions towards the outside world. It also includes ideas about the complicated and rich "Russian soul," the "unique Russian civilization" and the perception of the constant threat to this "civilization" from the "Western civilization." This old idea is getting its popularity again in the circles of political elites, fuelling their beliefs about the need of a strong leader and a set of traditional values, based on patriotism and anti-Western sentiment to protect the sovereignty of the country. However, the imperial consciousness only comes to life in the masses if it is purposefully activated by political forces, relying at the same time on favourable conditions such as the citizens' fatigue of reforms (Pain, 2015).

The imperial consciousness, activated and reconstructed in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, having established itself, began to exert a noticeable influence on political life, causing demand for the type of popular political figures and their discourse. Reconstructed traditionalism combined with relatively stable features of geography, economy, and cultural traditions of the country – all this influences the reproduction of the "imperial syndrome", which, to a certain extent, now forms the channel of political creativity in Russia, causing a high probability of reproduction of imperial traits in the politics of this country (ibid.).

Pain (2015) identifies certain traits of Russian imperial nationalism. First, **essentialism**, or the idea of the particular eternal cultural properties of the Russian people, fundamentally distinguishing them from other peoples, in particular from the peoples of

Western Europe. The West has always acted as a “constituting other” in relation to Russian nationalism. Second, **the imperial protective character** of Russian nationalism, or service to the autocracy and the preservation of the empire was initially the most important goal. Finally, the principle of **political dominance of ethnic Russians**: the idea of protecting the people of the empire with the demand that the empire grants preferential rights in it to ethnic Russians.

Nationalism based on these principles, conceptually and organizationally developed in the Russian Empire in the 1900s, and then, after a period of prohibition in the Soviet years, was revived in the 1990s. Initially, it was an oppositional political force opposing the officially proclaimed ideas of modernization, tolerance, federalism, and liberalism. However, since the early 2000s imperial nationalism becomes a political companion of the Russian government (ibid.).

Critical Geopolitics

Since my research is concerned with territorial claims, the concept of geopolitics is necessary to adopt.

Geopolitics, as formulated by Jo Sharp (2009, p. 358), is “an aspect of the practice and analysis of statecraft which considers geography and spatial relations to play a significant role in the constitution of international politics.” Originally, the study of geopolitics was interested in how geographical considerations, such as location, size of the country and availability of resources influenced the development of global politics throughout history. However, as O´Tuathail (1996) claims, “classical geopolitics” was inherently imperialistic in its nature. The term “geopolitics,” according to him, “ is a convenient fiction, an imperfect name for a set of practices within the civil societies of the Great Powers that sought to explain the meaning of the new global conditions of space, power, and technology” (O´Tuathail, 1996, p. 12).

The field of Critical Geopolitics emerged in 1980 on the wave of revived interest in political geography and challenged the dominant scholarship. Influenced by post-structuralist thought, critical geopolitics examines how certain discourses create political practices. Gearoid O´Tuathail, one of the founders of the new school of thought, aimed to develop a critical method, which would challenge the underlying assumptions made about the role of geography in understanding international politics. Critical geopolitics seeks to investigate how international politics are spatially imagined, and by doing so, to unveil the political dynamics behind writing the world geography (Sharp, 2009). While conventional geopolitics is based on the tradition of realist political thought and claims to be objective,

critical geopolitics questions the biases of not only politicians but also scholars of political geography and calls for a thorough investigation of how the knowledge was produced.

Following Foucault's idea of the inseparability of power and knowledge, critical geopolitics claims that those, whose maps and interpretations of world politics are widely accepted as true, hold the power. O´Tuathail (1996) argues that geography is not innocent and objective but is always embedded with a power-knowledge relationship.

For critical geopolitics, geography is first of all a discourse, where geographical order is produced and imposed on the world by influential persons and institutions. O´Tuathail (1996) called this process **geo-graphing** (earth-writing) to stress its discursive aspect. He also proposes the term **geo-politics** (with a hyphen) as the "politics of writing global space" (1996, p. 14) and calls for a thorough examination of the textuality of foreign policy discourses and the geo-graphing of the global political space. Geopolitics, he reminds us, is not an intrinsically meaningful and present concept but rather a discursive event. He proposes the term **geo-power** to denote "the functioning of geographical knowledge not as an innocent body of knowledge and learning but as an ensemble of technologies of power concerned with the governmental production and management of territorial space" (O´Tuathail, 1996, p. 5).

What is particularly interesting in this approach in relation to my research, is how the identity formation as the division between "us" and "them," "our space" and "their space," is understood as an essential moment in critical geopolitics. According to O´Tuathail (1996), geopolitics is more than just describing or forecasting the shape of international politics; it is crucial to how identity is generated and sustained in modern countries. Defying territorial borders to create 'us' and 'them' of the nation not only reflects on seemingly inherent differences but also helps to produce differences. By representing "the other" in certain terms, the positive image of the self is created and the normative identity is imposed on citizens. Furthermore, critical geopolitics aims to uncover how geopolitical rhetoric aims not only to impose a certain representation of the world upon citizens but also to invoke an emotional response in them.

The struggle over geography is not only the actual battles but also a conflict between competing ways of envisioning the world, not only an attempt to represent certain physical boundaries but to create discursive borders (ibid.).

Imaginative geographies influence real geographical practices by producing certain geographical orders and relations. Creating "the other" and the presumed danger associated with it is used in both external and internal politics. Internally, the feeling of external threat can be used, for example, for disciplining the domestic subject. Externally, geopolitical metaphors, such as "evil empire" or "communist disease," aided in the legitimization of certain political decisions (Sharp, 2009).

Investigating Putin’s speeches and their TV representations through the lens of critical geopolitics theory can help me to understand how the “truth” about the Russian and Ukrainian territories is discursively constructed and how this discourse legitimises current Russian political practices.

4. Methodology

Methodology and data

Due to the exploratory nature of my research, I took a qualitative approach employing the Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis methods.

My main data was derived from Putin's speeches and their representations at the news broadcasts on Russia’s one of the most popular news channels, The First (Pervyi Kanal). The logic behind the data choice and the way of performing the analysis are determined by my interest in, first, deconstructing Putin’s speeches as vehicles of official ideology and second, investigating how the official state agenda, articulated in these speeches, is channelled in the news since media plays a key role in constructing the national identity. Anderson (2006) sees the emergence of the printing press as the catalyst of awakening national self-consciousnesses and understands media as a prerequisite for the creation of imagined communities. Though originally, Anderson applies his theory only to the printed media, I believe it could be fruitfully implemented in the analysis of television as well. Since television is a primary information source for the majority of Russians (Alyukov, 2022), it serves as the key tool for national identity projection. However, the analytical focus is on the speeches, since they can be seen as the quintessence of the Kremlin ideology, and the analysis of the TV programmes mainly aims to observe how the speeches are reflected in the media. What is interesting to me is how a certain narrative of nationhood is promoted.

The two speeches that I have chosen are both concerned with territorial claims and spacial reimagination, and they both marked important milestones in Russian-Ukrainian modern history. The “Crimean speech” manifested the beginning of the first stage of the war in 2014, and the speech from the 21 February 2022 - the beginning of the current stage. Despite that neither of these speeches proclaims the war, I believe that they both are extremely significant because they “prepare” the audience for further military intervention, framing it in a certain way.

Since this paper is concerned with discourse, power and ideology, the choice of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), theorised by Norman Fairclough, seems to be natural. CDA understands language as a form of social practice which is always situated in a specific historical and social context. However, Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Analysis offers a rich and useful vocabulary to analyse the intrinsic connections within the texts on a meta-level of discourse.

I believe that the combination of these two approaches is beneficial to this analysis.

The analysis, therefore, proceeds in two steps. First, using CDA, I analyse the text of each speech in order to identify the key messages and narratives, myths and reasonings. Then I look at the news broadcasts, which followed this speech on the First channel and examine how the main ideas and messages are channelled there, and how the agenda of the broadcasts corresponds to the key ideas of the speech. The same is repeated with both texts and corresponding news items. In the second step, using Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Analysis, I move to a meta-level and try to identify patterns and examine how the narratives were changing along with the unfolding history.

Fairclough (1995) argues for the necessity of analysing the text in the original language. Therefore, taking advantage of Russian being my native language, I analysed the data in Russian and then translated the results of the analysis into English.

In the following subchapters, I am providing an overview of the two chosen methods.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a theoretical approach to the study of language and power. Fairclough sees discourse as a form of social practice that both shapes the social world and is in turn shaped by social practices. Critical Discourse Analysis aims at a systematic investigation of the often blurry relationships of determination and causality between discourses and broader social and cultural context; the way discursive events and practices are shaped by power relations and how the opacity of these interactions between society and discourse is a factor in maintaining hegemony and power (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Analysis of texts should aim to clarify how they contribute to the meaning-making process (Fairclough, 2003).

Fairclough (1995, p. 7) understands discourse as the "use of language seen as a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is an analysis of how texts work within the sociocultural practice." It involves examining the linguistic and discursive features of texts to identify patterns and trends. This includes looking at the structure and organization of texts,

as well as the vocabulary and rhetoric used, to uncover the underlying ideologies and power relations at work.

Texts, according to Fairclough (2003), have causal effects on the social and material world, however, we have to remember that texts can have different effects on different interpreters. CDA pursues to examine the part that discoursive practice is playing in the maintenance of the social world and the power struggle embedded in social relations. Therefore, it is crucial for Fairclough that not only text should be the subject of discourse analysis, but also the links between the text and cultural and societal processes *(*Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

In CDA theory, "Discourse contributes to the construction of:

• social identities;

• social relations; and

• systems of knowledge and meaning.

Thus, a discourse has three functions: an identity function, a 'relational' function and an 'ideational' function" *(*Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 67).

Fairclough (1995) insists that all three aspects should be addressed while analysing a communicative event. He proposes the three-dimensional model of discourse analysis:

1. Analysis of the linguistic characteristics of the text itself;
2. Analysis of the discursive practice (the process of production and interpretation of the text);
3. Analysis of social practice (the social context where the communicative event is situated).

Investigating the relationships between social practice and language in a form of explanatory critique is therefore the main goal of CDA *(*Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

Fairclough (1995) emphasises that close linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis, showing how a text is drawing on the available *orders of discourse*, should support and complement each other. He sees the language and the order of discourse as centripetal forces of any discursive event.

Each *communicative event* is a form of social practice that either challenges or reproduces the order of discourse. *The order of discourse* is all genres and potentially competing discourses within a specific social area.

Interdiscursivity is a type of *intertextuality*, a state in which all communicative events draw on events that happened before. Intertextuality is a manifestation of the mutual influence that text and history make on each other. An intertextual chain is a set of texts in which every text includes aspects from other texts.*"Manifest intertextuality"* is an instance when a text openly refers to other texts (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

Fairclough (1995) emphasises the necessity to analyse not only the content of the text but also its *texture*, organization and form. He also insists on the importance of analyzing not only what is in the text, but paying particular attention to the absences, as they are not less significant than the text itself. In addition to it, the implicit meanings of the text can be of great importance. "Analysis of implicit content can provide valuable insights into what is taken as given, as common sense. It also gives a way into an ideological analysis of texts, for ideologies are generally implicit assumptions" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 6).

Wodak et al. (2009), who also use CDA in their research, argue that since political speeches are characterized by their persuasive orientation, it is necessary to use a method which can help to identify argumentative and rhetorical features inherent to them. For the close textual analysis I will follow the structure proposed by Wodak et al. who identify "three closely interwoven dimensions of analysis:

1. Contents
2. Strategies
3. Means and forms of realisation" (2009, p. 30).

CDA is not positioning itself as taking an objective and neutral stance, on the contrary, it allies with those who experience political and social injustice and serves as a discursive intervention in political and social practices (Fairclough, 1995). My analysis of the discursive construction of the Russian national identity is, then, an intervention aiming at uncovering manipulative manoeuvres and rhetoric strategies, promoting certain opinions and beliefs, and raising awareness of the essentialists and dogmatic nature of the conception of national identity.

Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Analysis

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe offer a sophisticated poststructuralist approach to discourse analysis, drawing on the idea that social phenomena are never-ending processes where meaning can never be fully fixed (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). They understand the goal of discourse analysis as the deconstruction of taken-for-granted structures. What is particularly resonating with my research problem, is their view on the individual and collective identity as a result of an ongoing discursive process and a discursive struggle.

Terminology offered by Laclau and Mouffe allows one to connect the dots (or rather knots in the fishing net of the discourse) and map the process of discursive struggle (ibid.)

I am employing the following terms for my analysis, as explained by Jørgensen and Phillips, so the rest of the chapter refers to their book Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method (2002).

Elements are polysemic signs in the sense that their meaning has not been fixed yet and they have a variety of possible meanings. *Articulation* is understood as a process of establishing connections between *elements* and resulting in the modification of their identity. *Articulation* leads to the creation of a structured totality, or *discourse*. Each articulation is either challenging or reproducing existing discourses by attempting to establish meaning in a certain way. It is important that for Laclau and Mouffe, articulations are not merely verbal practices but all social practices and acts.

All signs that constitute discourse are called *moments,* their meaning is constituted through their juxtaposition to each other. They can be imagined as knots in the fishing net, however, unlike Saussurian understanding of this net as permanent, in Laclau and Mouffe's theory, it can never be fully fixed. The concept of *discourse* then can be understood in a way that "a discourse attempts to transform elements into moments by reducing their polysemy to a fully fixed meaning" (ibid., p. 28). This attempt establishes *closure*, however, as Laclau and Mouffe argue, the transformation of *elements* into *moments* can never be definitive, therefore, *closure* is also only a temporary stop. Discourse, therefore, is a "temporary closure" (ibid., p. 29)

Partial fixation of the meaning around *nodal points* is what forms a discourse. A nodal point is a privileged sign, which organizes all the other signs within the discourse and from the relation to which these signs derive their meaning. However, a nodal point is an empty sign in itself, until it is placed in a particular discourse, and in that, it is also an *element*. The *elements*, which are particularly open for various meanings assigned by competing discourses, are called *floating signifiers*. *A nodal point* can be at the same time a *floating signifier*, however, while "the term 'nodal point' refers to a point of crystallisation within a specific discourse, the term 'floating signifier' belongs to the ongoing struggle between different discourses to fix the meaning of important signs" (ibid., p. 28).

A discourse becomes an established totality when all the signs within it obtain their meanings through interrelation with each other. It happens by excluding all the other potential meanings that signs could have, therefore discourse can be understood as a limitation of possibilities. All the possibilities, excluded by the act of articulation, form a *field of discursivity*, a reservoir of meanings, which the signs have or had in other discourses. Jørgensen and Phillips, however, propose to distinguish between the field of discursivity, which includes all possible meanings and *order of discourse,* a term borrowed from Fairclough and referring only to those discourses that compete within the same domain.

According to Discourse theory, we should concentrate on the individual expressions in their function as articulations and investigate what meanings they produce by arranging the elements in certain connections with one another, and what meaning possibilities they disregard. Laclau and Mouffe see the aim of Discourse Analysis as investigating how discourses are constructed and changed. The subject of the analysis is, therefore, the process of constructing objectivity through discursively producing meaning (ibid.)

Objective discourses are fixed so tightly that their arbitrariness is forgotten, they seem to be given, unquestionable and commonsensical. However, it is only seemingly, and that is why objectivity and *ideology* are equated in discourse theory.

The understanding of *power* is similar to Foucauldian, it is seen not as something which can be possessed but rather as something that produces the social. Power creates knowledge, social identities and relations between individuals and groups.

Probably, one of the most useful terms from the discourse analysis theory for my paper is the concept of *myth* - a floating signifier refering to a totality. "The country" is an example of such a floating signifier in that it can be imbued with different meanings by different articulations. A total structure like that is imagined by people in order to ascribe meaning to their acts. Discourse analysis aims to identify and examine societal myths as objective realities and investigate how different social actors are imbuing myths as floating signifiers with a variety of contents in the struggle to establish their particular interpretation of "society" as dominant.

Borrowing the term *interpellation* from Althusser, Laclau and Mouffe say that people are being interpellated by discourses, which always designate for them certain *subject positions*. The subject is also understood as *fragmented*, meaning that different discourses can ascribe different positions to this subject. The subject can be *overdetermined* by competing discourses, therefore having a possibility to identify differently in different situations.

Through investing in different discourses, the subject is constantly trying to "find itself." The subject positions, provided by discourses, offer opportunities for identification and as such, identity construction. A *master signifier*, then, is a nodal point of identity. A particular discourse connects signifiers in *chains of equivalence*, in a way that identity is formed through relations between these signifiers. The discursive construction of, for example, "country," draws on what "country" differs from and what it equals to. In that way, discourse provides an individual or a group, which identifies with a certain subject position, with guidance on how to behave in order to fit. The identity, then, is obtained through being *represented* by a constellation of signifiers surrounding a nodal point.

The logic of equivalence and *the logic of difference* are concepts, describing the discursive process of group formation. While the former means neglecting all the differences

within a certain group, the latter means defying identity by juxtaposition with the other groups.

In the discursive process, identities can be accepted, negotiated or refused. Collective and individual identity formations are understood by Laclau and Mouffe as following the same principals. Group identity formation, then, is a closure in undecidable terrain working through rejecting alternative interpretations. Group identity is constructed in juxtaposition with the other groups.

Representation plays a crucial role in the creation of groups. Groups do not naturally exist, but rather are formed through discourse, which involves someone speaking on behalf of or about the group. Representation allows someone to act as a representative for others who are not physically present.

A *social antagonism* happens when identities become mutually excluding, for example, in the case of war when national identity is competing with other identities such as professional. *Hegemonic interventions* are articulations aiming to dissolve antagonisms by reestablishing unambiguity. The discourse is the result of this process.

Limitations and delimitations

Due to the restricted time frame and number of characters, I had to choose only two speeches, which significantly narrowed the scope of the research. Having more speeches analyzed would provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of Russian national identity as constructed by Putin. Having more time would also allow me to engage with a broader pool of available literature on the topic.

Discourse analysis as a method also poses certain limitations. As was already discussed in the introduction, though the researcher always aims for objectivity, there is no way to tell the pure truth. Therefore, my analysis has a certain degree of distortion caused by my innate subjectivity.

While Fairclough calls for an examination of the processes of production and interpretation of the texts while doing CDA, due to not having the possibility to get an insight into the production process and to do audience reception research, I had to skip this step. Doing it would allow investigating how this constructed identity reverberated with actual people and to understand to what extent it is internalized.

5. Analysis

As proposed by Fairclough, I aim to conduct a “critical description” of the speeches.

Following Wodak et al. (2009) I believe that national identity is dynamic and context-dependant, and I see these speeches as articulations, fixing certain elements in a “temporary closure,” which is, in my case, national identity. I concentrate, therefore, mainly on the identity function of the language.

By conducting a coding of the texts I identified certain themes and patterns, and, focusing on the themes concerned with national identity, developed a thematic matrix for the analysis.

“Crimean speech.” March 18, 2014

The address from March 18, 2014, known as the “Crimean speech,” is dedicated to the annexation of Crimea and was officially addressed to the Federal Assembly, asking the members to recognize Crimea as part of the Russian Federation, but in fact, it is appealing to all Russian and Ukrainian population, as well as the West, however, the messages encoded in the text are different for different audiences.

The people, or Mythical We

Putin almost never uses the pronoun “I,” which can be easily omitted in the Russian language, however, in many sentences it sounds rather artificial, leading to the conclusion that it is a deliberate omission. He mainly speaks from the collective “we” or “us” as if representing the Russian nation as a whole.

“Russia,” “our country” and “we” are used as an unquestionable entity of like-minded, like-spirited people. The unitedness of Russia is articulated in such sentences as: “The firmness of Russia's foreign policy position was based on the will of millions of people, on national unity.”[4] Stating that the decision about the annexation can be “based only on the will of the people, because only the people are the source of any power” he, on one hand, legitimizes the decision, and on the other hand, shifts responsibility from himself. Though Putin acknowledges that “Here, as in any democratic society, there are different points of view,” bringing up the poll results he claims that “the position of the absolute… majority of citizens is also obvious.” As sociologist Greg Yudin (2020) argues, statistics and polls in Russia are heavily controlled by the state and serve as tools to create the appearance of legitimacy for the government's actions. Demography, then, serves as a substitute for

[4] This and all subsequent quotes are referred to http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603

democracy in Russia, creating the illusion of a country, ruled by people, and leaders who base their politics on people's will. On the other hand, Putin does not acknowledge that the Ukrainian elections were democratic and frames them as a distracting manipulation that has nothing to do with people's will.

Russia is described as a country where cultures and traditions of different ethnicities were melted together, but at the same time, none of the ethnicities disappeared or was dissolved in the Russian nation, all of them were preserved within the Russian realm, and in that Russia and Crimea are so much alike. However, "a big multinational country" can be seen as a euphemism for "an empire." The parallel between Russia and Crimea as multicultural territories, a topos of sameness, enforces both the strategy of unification and justification.

At the same time, he says that "The Russian people have become one of the largest, if not the largest divided people in the world," and "became national minorities" in former Soviet republics. The word "minorities," especially concerning national minorities, is usually associated with marginalization and deprivation of rights, and therefore, the need to be protected, and that is what Russia is claiming to be doing.

Putin uses personification, generalization and emotive language such as "our soul hurts for everything that happens in Ukraine," and "we felt it with our heart and soul," to frame the political issue as personal, establishing the emotional dimension of justification strategy.

The mythical We in this speech is narrated using the strategy of positive uniqueness. Russia is portrayed as a country always willing to collaborate and meet halfway, as a benevolent, strong and decisive "big brother", who is not scared of answering to a bully. The strategy of unification supports the sentiment of solidarity with the in-group members.

Common past, including the historical memory and myth of origins.

Historical discourse plays a key role in this speech. The whole paragraphs are dedicated to describing how Crimea has been an integral part of Russian history from the time of Prince Vladimir's baptism in Chersonese in the 10th century. The references to history and "historical injustice" are found throughout the whole text, especially at the beginning, for example: "it is enough to know the history of Crimea, to know what Russia meant and means for Crimea and Crimea for Russia." Putting it this way, he establishes mutual relations of significance for both, intertwining their destinies and alienating Crimea from any relationship with Ukraine.

Crimea in this speech is portrayed as an inseparable part of Russian identity. Here, the spatial and temporal dimensions of identity are tightly intertwined, and the historical claims

are helping to legitimize the annexation of the territory. The loss of Crimea is framed as a "blatant historical injustice": Crimea was historically a Russian territory and it was lost as a result of Khruschev's unreasonable actions, without considering the will of the Crimeans. The referendum and annexation, then, are just fixing this historical injustice.

One of the paradoxes, mentioned by Anderson (2006) is that despite nations being relatively modern phenomena, they perceive themselves through claims to antiquity. Appeal to common history enforces justification strategy, legitimizing the annexation. "In Crimea, literally everything is permeated with our common history and pride." Putting the words "history" and "pride" next to each other, he frames Russian history in Crimea as inherently positive, despite that it is in fact a history of wars, genocide and imperial dominance. The adjective "permeated" further grounds the history, and therefore, Russian national identity, into the Crimean territory.

The return of Crimea, "a symbol of Russian military glory and unprecedented valour," a sacred place, is the return of Russian imperial power. The sentiment of imperial nostalgia is persistent in this speech. Though the word "empire" is never used, since in the contemporary discourse it has a negative connotation, the sentiment of imperialist grandeur is evident. "The grandeur" of the Russian empire was at the expense of the impoverished population, therefore direct references to it are omitted, and, instead, a vague and rather abstract image of former greatness is used. This speculative and selective approach to history aims to evoke a sense of national pride and activate the national identity.

In light of Anderson's view on nationalism, the following quote is particularly interesting: "The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea." The image of the soldiers who gave their lives for the land serves as a symbol of a pledge that Russia paid for having this land. He, however, does not mention the graves of Roman, Turkish, Gothic and other soldiers who, in different historical periods, also fought for this land and died for it. Though he acknowledges that Crimea is a multicultural region, he implies that Russia has more rights for it, even though it became a part of the Russian Empire only in 1783, less than 300 years ago, which, in the scale of history is a rather short period. Putin frames the annexation of Crimea at that time not as exercising imperial power but as "taking the land under protection", and this euphemism is making Russia look like a benefactor rather than an aggressor, which is very much in line with traditional Russian historiography.

The myth of origin manifests itself in the reference to the baptism of Vladimir in Chersonesus, which is framed as a key event that predetermined the common cultural history of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Mentioning Crimean cities as places where events, crucial for Russian history, had happened and rooting the Russian nation in these places,

presenting historical interpretations and manipulations as a historical reality, Putin strives to establish a presumably unquestionable right over this territory.

Thinking about Russian history in Crimea, it is hard to avoid the Tatar genocide in 1944, and it is interesting how Putin frames it. “Yes, there was a period when Crimean Tatars, as well as some other peoples of the USSR, were treated cruelly unfairly.” He uses the passive voice, “were treated,” without specifying who was responsible for that and uses the euphemism “treated unfairly” for describing a genocide. At the same time, he emphasises that also millions of Russians suffered from the repressions. With the support of this argumentation, he realizes two strategies: the shift of blame and responsibility from the Russians to some abstract Soviet entity, and the strategy of downplaying, drawing on negative sameness and trivializing the tragedy.

“Historical memory” is one of the key parts of national identity, and claiming that there are “attempts to deprive Russians [living in Ukraine] of historical memory” Putin implies that it is a threat to the Russian national identity.

National body

Crimea is described as an integral part of the Russian national body. Through the claim that out of 2,200,000 Crimeans 1.5 million are Russians, the body of the nation is discursively extended to Crimea, legitimizing the decision to acquire this territory and making it sound like common sense.

Further, Putin explicitly says that “In the hearts and minds of people, Crimea has always been and remains an integral part of Russia,” and he claims that this is “based on truth and justice.” This hasty generalization fallacy, unsupported claim to truth and the emotive noun “heart” help realising unification strategy on the irrational, emotional level. Common emotional attitudes and beliefs are an important trait of national identity, therefore it is crucial for Putin to portray this belief about Crimea as shared by all the people.

The narrative of the national body is constructed also around the national border. Speaking about the NATO expansion to the east, Putin says “we are against a military organization running near our fence, near our house or on our historical territories.” Using the metaphor “fence” to describe a national border and “house” for the country, he brings the narrative to the personal level making the audience perceive “the threat” as being close and evoking the feeling of home needing defence. By framing it this way, he also makes the audience interpret Russia’s actions in Crimea as defensive rather than offensive because protecting one’s home is natural and right.

Putin claims that Crimea is a strategic territory and it “should be under strong, stable sovereignty, which in fact can only be Russian today.” Through the strategy of

delegitimation, he undermines the right of Ukraine, unstable and torn by internal conflict, and therefore, weak, to have control over this territory. By this, he is promoting a typical imperial view on might, right, capability and superiority as inherent Russian national traits.

It is important to mention that in the Crimean speech Putin explicitly promises that other regions of Ukraine will not follow the path of Crimea: "We don't want the partition of Ukraine, we don't need it."

Trauma

Russia is depicted as always willing to cooperate with Western partners and Ukraine, as open and honest but always neglected and offended.

The metaphor "a robbery" in relation to Crimea's transition to Ukraine in Soviet times evokes a feeling of injustice and humiliation and works on the strategy of delegitimation of that decision, framing it not only as a mistake but a crime. Personification "Russia accepted and swallowed this insult" brings a political issue at the personal level, in the realm of human feelings, aiming to make the audience internalize it as their own.

Figures of speech, taken from the colloquial language, help Putin to sound like "a common person," to evaluate the situation in terms of common sense and to create vivid images that help to make the point. For example, the simile "Crimeans say that… they were passed from hand to hand just like a bag of potatoes" invokes a feeling of unjust treatment and dehumanisation shown by the former USSR leaders. It is often stressed in the speech that the opinions of "common people" were disregarded and marginalized. Putin, therefore, is framing himself as the one giving a voice to the people through the referendum and somehow healing this trauma.

The description of Ukraine's attitude towards Russia is often saturated with sentiments of mistreatment and betrayal from the Ukrainian side.

Another "offender" is the collective West: "We were deceived time after time, decisions were made behind our backs." Scheff (1994, in Langman, 2006) argues that the feeling of humiliation, fostering shame and estrangement, can be used by politicians to fuel hatred towards the Other. Using collective "we" aims to project this feeling to the entire population.

The Other

Since national identities are relative, the image of "the other" is an important constitutive element of them. In this speech two "others" can be identified: the collective

West and Ukraine. While the image of the West is rather straightforward, the image of Ukraine is more ambivalent and contradictive, switching between "us" and "them" depending on the context. Through the strategy of dissimilation, the people of Ukraine ("our brothers") are distinguished from the "impostors" who initiated the coup in Ukraine and usurped power. At some point, Putin explicitly declares that "there is still no legitimate executive power in Ukraine" and "there is no one to talk to." Derogatory lexical units such as "impostors" and "usurped," and the adjective "so-called" in relation to Ukrainian politicians help to further enforce the strategy of delegitimation, justifying unwillingness to have a dialogue with this government and the decision to initiate the referendum without approval from the Ukrainian side. He also uses emotionally loaded nouns such as "terror, and murder, and pogroms" to invoke an emotional response in the audience. Putin portrays former Ukrainian presidents and prime ministers using the metaphor "milking Ukraine," emphasising their consumerist attitude towards their own country. He does not mention, however, that before Maidan, most of the Ukrainian presidents were under the Kremlin's control, and he certainly does not acknowledge that in Russia he and his "friends" are doing precisely the same "milking."

Putin describes those, who "usurped" the power in Ukraine as "nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites," and "Ukrainian ideological heirs of Bandera, Hitler's henchman." The narrative of World War II, or The Great Patriotic War as it is most often called in Russia, is playing a paramount role in forming the sense of Russian national identity. "The country which defeated fascism" is often used internally as a synonym for Russia. Therefore such words as "nazi," "fascism" or "Hitler" serve as very strong emotional triggers, referring to an important historical discourse and activating historical memory and national identity.

The disintegration of the Ukrainian people from the state power is necessary: since countless Russians have relatives and friends in Ukraine, framing it as an enemy would not work. Ukrainian people are portrayed as "brothers," and through this personification, and personification of Kyiv as "a Mother of Russian cities," the image of a family is created, implying the imperative to take care and protect it from the "fascists."

The collective West led by the USA is not yet openly proclaimed as an enemy, since Putin still needs international recognition of his actions and does not want to jeopardise trade relations with the West. However, it is portrayed as a sly and aggressive entity neglecting Russian national interests. Calling the West a "sponsor" of the Ukrainian politicians, Putin shifts the responsibility for the instability and chaos in Ukraine. He blames them for "double standards," "acting as they please" and being guided not by international law, but by "the right of the strong." He claims that Western countries believe that they are

"chosen and exceptional," shifting focus from his own rhetoric about Russian exceptionalism.

The following quote is very well summarizing Putin's depiction of the West-Russia opposition, therefore, I bring it here in full:

> "In short, we have every reason to believe that the notorious policy of containment of Russia, which was carried out in the XVIII, XIX, and XX centuries, continues today. They are constantly trying to drive us into some kind of corner for having an independent position, for defending it, for calling things by their proper names and not being hypocritical."

The nouns "containment" and "corner" are supporting the narrative of Russia as a "besieged fortress," which is enabling a unification strategy. He refers to "the policy of containment," a geopolitical doctrine, which was an important component of the Cold War, however, he extends it to the XVIII and XIX centuries. Temporal references such as the verb "continues," adverb "constantly" and a reference to the three consecutive centuries, paint an image of the Russia-West confrontation as a historical state of affairs, as a continuous civilisational antagonism. Extending "the policy of containment" to the modern days, he implicitly declares that Russia and the West are in the state of the Cold War again. By doing that he also shifts the responsibility for the worsening relationships to the West, while claiming that "we ourselves will never seek confrontation with our partners." The "besieged" cannot be an aggressor, therefore, this image aims to promote Russian innocence.

Russia, juxtaposed to the aggressive West is then painted as honest, independent, "civilized" and a "good neighbour."

This speech is characterised by a high degree of interdiscursivity, drawing on political, historical, legal, sociological, populist and other discourses. As Fairclough argues, high interdiscursivity is typical for articulations challenging the dominating order of discourse. The dominating discourse, in this case, was that Crimea belongs to Ukraine. By the international community, the annexation of Crimea was considered illegal and perceived as a violent intervention. Therefore claiming its legitimacy is the primary goal of this speech. This interdiscursive blend allows for securing the state's position and actions from three main points: statistics, law and history, making the decisions made seem as the only possible and reasonable. The linguistic strategies of legitimization of own acts and delegitimation of an opponent serve to enhance this rhetoric. Affirmative intonation and objective modality, presenting interpretations as facts, also contribute to this narrative.

Using a folksy-posturing manner of speech, manifested in oftentimes referred "common people," colloquial language such as "trumpeted to the whole world, bent everyone [in the sexual sense]," emotive vocabulary and the syntax typical for everyday language, Putin aims to sound as if "speaking the same language" with the audience.

The passive tense is used very rarely, and the active tense is prevailing, establishing clear relations between actors and acts to remove any ambiguity, placing on the "nationalists" and the West responsibility for the situation in Ukraine and to Russia - the responsibility to help Crimea.

The identity function of the language is realized through the strategy of unification and positive uniqueness. Certain attitudes and beliefs towards Crimea presented as right and natural, are projected to the entire population. As can be seen from this analysis, different elements of the national identity are elaborated in different proportions, and the narratives of common history and the Other are certainly dominating. Putin is basically acting like a populist historian, presenting his version of history as the only one and omitting unpleasant events or trivializing them. Through the historical narratives, Putin is inscribing Crimea into Russian national identity and geo-graphing a new spacial order. Pretending to draw on the "will of the people" he exercises the geo-power to rewrite the world's boundaries.

Analysis of the news broadcast following the "Crimean speech."

To examine how the events connected to the Presidental speech are articulated in the media, I will look into the news items which followed the speech. Unfortunately, an entire news programme is not available in the archive, however, there is access to separate news stories from that day.

On March 18, 2022, there were 85 video news items, as available on the channel's website[5]. Among them, 55 are dedicated to the annexation of Crimea and the situation in Ukraine, and seven to the European and American sanctions. The rest covers the Paralympic Games team coming back to Russia, a new program for the construction of economy-class housing, launched by the government, and some regional events.

"We are together" sounded over the whole of Russia[6]

This news story is dedicated to the celebration of the Crimea referendum that took place in a form of a concert at the Red Square in Moscow and demonstrations in other cities.

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[5] https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-03-18/
[6] https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-03-18/46149-my_vmeste_prozvuchalo_nad_vsey_rossiey
For English translation see Appendix 1.2

An excerpt from the Presidental speech is followed by interviewing people on the streets.

The whole intonation of the news story is triumphant, victorious and cheerful. As one of the interviewed people says, “I think March 16th is like May 9th, the second historical date and everyone should be happy.” This remark is very important as it brings reference to World War II, which, as mentioned before, has an immense significance in forming Russian national identity. It signifies the rebirth of Russian pride and reinstalls the feeling of power.

The remarks of the passers-by are drawing on different interpretative repertoires, making sense and creating meanings of the Crimean referendum as important not only for the state but for individuals. These repertoires include pride for the country, family reunification (both in a figurative and literate sense), love, and togetherness as the cornerstone of security.

The main narrative of the news story is “bringing Crimea back home.” This narrative is strengthening the perception of annexation as justice being made and as fixing something that was wrong but now it is right. Using the metaphor “home” for the whole country, it is creating the image of the citizens as one family. A family might have internal quarrels, but a family is still a unity of loving people who would stand for each other. As mentioned by the news anchor, people who came to support the annexation might have different interests and political preferences, but they are united by caring about Crimea. Such signifiers as “family” and “home” are taking viewers’ attention from the possible political repercussions of the annexation and bringing it to a personal level. These signifiers are charged with strong sentimental feelings, and their use is intended to evoke the perception of the annexation of Crimea as a personally meaningful event.

This news story has a rather clear objective: to present the annexation of Crimea as supported by all citizens of Russia. It is emphasised in one of the final remarks: “All regions of the country are celebrating this event today.”

“Crimea was, is and will be Russia,” - this statement, made by the news anchorman is literary repeating the line from the Presidential speech.

“We do not let our people behind” is another very important remark. This catchphrase (the actual origin is unknown) later became a motto of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Framing Crimeans as “our people” places responsibility for their well-being and safety on the Russian population, and the whole phrase serves as a justification for any actions that were and will be taken to protect “our” people.

None of the multiple news stories which followed the speech of the President is challenging the Kremlin’s official position or offering an alternative view. All the items were found to reiterate, support and reinforce the regime’s agenda.

The speech from 21 February 2022. On recognizing the independence of the Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics.[7]

In this speech, the President addresses the citizens of Russia and asks the Federal Assembly to recognize the independent status of the Donbas republics. Though at that time incorporation of these republics into Russia was not yet discussed (it happened later, in September 2022), it was the first step towards that. Shortly after the recognition, the leaders of Republics asked Putin to help them fight "nationalists," which allowed Putin to start the official armed invasion. This speech is important as it prepares the ground for this geopolitical game.

In many instances, this speech reminds the Crimean speech: it is as well very long and elaborate and is characterised by employing similar discourses and narratives. The organization of both speeches follows the same pattern: they start with a "short course of Russian and Ukrainian history" and continue with describing the threat.

The people or Mythical We

Putin again almost does not use "I" and substitutes it with "we" and "us," taking the representational function.

Russia in this speech is also portrayed as a kind and benevolent neighbour and partner, always willing to help, always honest and friendly but cheated by both Ukraine and the West. The following qualities of "Russian personality" are crystallising through the speech:

Russia is generous. Not only Russia financially supported Ukraine and other CIS partners many times, "even though it faced a very dire situation itself," she also paid all Soviet debts, which were supposed to be divided between all the former Soviet Republics.

Russia is honest and respectful. "Russia always worked with Ukraine in an open and honest manner and, as I have already said, with respect for its interests."

Russia is also depicted as a peaceful actor on the world political stage, advocating "the resolution of the most complicated problems by political and diplomatic means, at the negotiating table" and it is "thanks to our openness and goodwill, relations between Russia and the West had reached a high level [in 2000]."

At the same time, Russia is strong and proud, and "will never compromise [her] sovereignty, national interests or values."

[7] All quotes in this chapter refer to http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828

Common past, including Historical memory and the Myth of origin

This speech also starts with a "historical tour" of the past. Ukraine is described as "an integral part of our own history, culture, and spiritual space." By framing it as a "part" Putin draws on Sovietophile and Russophile historiography, implicitly proclaiming Russia as the leading nation and Ukraine - as a secondary and subordinate. It is also manifested in calling Ukrainian territory "the outskirts of the former empire," framing it as provincial and insignificant compared to Russia.

The historical narrative continues further: "For a long time, the inhabitants of the southwestern historical Old Rus' lands called themselves Russian and Orthodox. This was the case before the XVII century when part of these territories was reunited with the Russian state, and after." As was outlined in the Background chapter, the history of Rus is far from being unambiguous, and different schools are debating whether the heritage of Rus belongs to Russia or Ukraine. The choice of Orthodoxy was politically determined and often imposed on the population through violence. However, by using a high number of evidentials, such as "it is a historical fact," "isn't it obvious?", "the fact remains the fact," "we all know about this" Putin aims to establish his version of history as truthful and commonsense, and fix it as an objective discourse. Speaking about such a complex matter as an ethnic and religious identity in such unambiguous and certain terms, drawing on the alleged "common knowledge" Putin aims to naturalize this narrative as something unquestionable.

He harshly criticizes and mocks decolonial movements in Ukraine and complains that "attempts are being made to condemn… landmarks of history to oblivion, along with the names of state and military figures of the Russian Empire." Commenting on the demolition of the Suvorov and Lenin monuments he claims that Ukrainians are "renouncing their own past." The demolition of monuments is playing an important role in many countries' deconstruction of the colonial past, and Ukraine is no exception. For Putin it means a symbolical "divorce" from Russia, and combined with the Western orientation which characterizes current Ukrainian politics, it is perceived by Putin as a betrayal. He, therefore, strives to discursively intertwine Russian and Ukrainian histories, trying to prove that they are inseparable. He claims that "the Ukrainian authorities… began by building their statehood on the negation of everything that united us, trying to distort the mentality and historical memory of millions of people…" He, therefore, frames these actions as a threat not only to Russian but also Ukrainian identity.

Speaking about the conquering of Novorossia during the war with the Osmans in the 18th century, he does not consider it as an act of colonialism or imperialism but rather

something that is unquestionably beneficial for the people living there. These euphemist descriptions of the colonial past are another trait that is consistent throughout the speeches.

National body

In this speech, Putin continues his narrative about the "robbery" and "historical injustice" in relation to giving territories inhabited by ethnic Russians to Ukraine. However, he goes even further, claiming that "modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia… by separating, severing what is historically Russian land. Nobody asked the millions of people living there what they thought." Putin argues that it is thanks to Russia that Ukraine has the territory of Novorossiya and access to the Black Sea. He says that "Stalin incorporated in the USSR and transferred to Ukraine some lands that previously belonged to Poland, Romania and Hungary," Donbas was "shoved into Ukraine" and "Khrushchev took Crimea away from Russia for some reason and also gave it to Ukraine. In effect, this is how the territory of modern Ukraine was formed." Here he again discursively extends the Russian national body to the Ukrainian territory, legitimizing this geographical claim by manipulating and reframing historical events. He mentions again the "common people," as if he himself knows what they actually wanted and can represent them. Using the metaphor "shoved" he emphasises that Donbas was artificially integrated into Ukraine.

The actions of former Soviet leaders are harshly criticised by Putin, he claims that "The collapse of historical Russia under the name of the USSR is on their conscience." Though USSR was a federal union of national republics, Putin, by equalizing Russia to USSR is again discursively extending Russian national borders.

The metaphor "generous gift" supported by the idiom "given from the lord's shoulder" is contributing to the narrative of the whimsical nature of the territorial division. Contrasted with the often repeated metaphor "Russia was robbed" it creates a perception of these territories as something rather unnecessary for Ukraine but essential and inherently belonging to Russia. Lenin is described "as the author and the architect of Ukraine," which creates an image of the country as an artificial construct, denying her role as an actor in the historical process.

Blaming the Western leaders for being hypocritical, Putin himself constantly applies double standards, for example, he implies that our military aggression is fine but theirs is not. Speaking about the NATO military centre in Ochakov, he claims the right to this city by saying that the "soldiers of Alexander Suvorov fought for this city. Owing to their courage, it became part of Russia." Putin's double standards are particularly obvious in his attitude

towards the right of the people and nations to self-determination. While this is one of his main arguments in relation to the Crimean referendum, and he celebrates the will of the Crimeans to join Russia, in relation to Ukraine, he calls people, who fought for Ukrainian independence, "nationalists."

Trauma

The dissolution of the USSR is portrayed as a dramatic and traumatic event, connected with "injustices, lies and outright pillage of Russia." The prerequisites for this tragedy are the disagreements among Bolsheviks and their goal to stay in power at all costs, which lead them to "the humiliating Treaty of Brest-Litovsk" and other mistakes in building the country.

Putin's narrative about the pro-Western direction that the new Ukrainian government took after the Maidan is saturated with the feeling of betrayal.

One can also sense a feeling of offence and humiliation when Putin speaks about "how America would feel about admitting Russia to NATO." Hesitation of the American president to accept Russia is taken by Putin as an insult.

The Other and the Threat

In this speech, the degree of depicting the West as an enemy plotting against Russia together with the Ukrainian "nationalists" has reached a very high level. The threat is the main point of the speech and the reason for asking the Federal Assembly to acknowledge the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk and Lugansk Republics. He uses the strategies of delegitimation, discrediting opponents and negative presentation, supporting them with a wide array of means of realisation.

Nationalism is taking a significant part of the rhetoric, being loaded with heavily negative connotations. Putin uses quite an elaborate derogatory metaphor to describe it: "The virus of nationalist ambitions is still with us, and the mine laid at the initial stage to destroy state immunity to the disease of nationalism was ticking. As I have already said, the mine was the right of secession from the Soviet Union." By comparing nationalism with a disease he triggers feelings of fear and disgust, and presents it as something dangerous and likely to spread if not stopped on time. Using two metaphors, "the disease" and "the mine," both of which are aimed at evoking the sense of danger, he makes this effect even stronger.

Nationalism in Russian political and public discourse is firmly associated with nazism and fascism. As was explained before, these words are having particular significance in

constructing Russian national identity, triggering historical memory saturated with a powerful mix of feelings, such as hatred and pride. The persistent narrative of “far-right nationalism, which rapidly developed into aggressive Russophobia and neo-Nazism” frames the desire of Ukrainians to decolonize their past and find their own path as hatred towards Russians and everything that is Russian. Putin claims that it is the nationalists who brought the country to a state of crisis and civil war, shifting the blame from himself.

Delegitimation and negative presentation strategies are manifested in accusing the officials in Kyiv of such crimes as terror, stealing and blackmailing, and portraying them as having “a parasitic attitude” towards both Russia and the West. The “radicals” and “nationalists”, which “usurped” the power in Ukraine, according to Putin, are funded by the **“**foreign sponsors,**”** who “were breeding their candidates in Ukraine.” The metaphor “breeding” is presenting Western involvement in Ukrainian politics as a continuous and well-planned operation, and the noun “sponsors” frames them as a hidden power behind the visible political figures. It is further enforced by calling Ukraine “a colony with a puppet regime.” By doing this, Putin further delegitimizes the current authorities and characterises Ukraine as subaltern and powerless. By questioning if Ukrainians are aware of who is managing their country, he enforces the dissimilation strategy, distinguishing between the citizens and the rulers. Colonialism here is again a phenomenon that is allegedly only inherent to the West, while the Russian attitude towards Ukraine is not seen as colonial.

Deligitimation of the Ukrainian state is also manifested in arguing that Ukraine “never had stable traditions of real statehood” and that democratic procedures were “a cover, a screen for the redistribution of power and property between various oligarchic clans.” This narrative is repeated in almost the same words two times, which signals its importance in Putin’s rhetoric.

Putin depicts the current situation in Ukraine as a socio-economical crisis and dedicates a great amount of time to elaborate on it. He blames Ukrainian leaders for spending and embezzling “the legacy inherited not only from the Soviet era but also from the Russian Empire,” and mentions the benefits Ukraine had from collaborating with Russia. By depicting it this way, he attributes to Russia the merit of Ukrainian economical development that goes deep in history. The “Western civilisational choice,” on the other hand, is depicted as leading to “poverty, lack of opportunity, and lost of industrial and technological potential.” This false dilemma fallacy portrays the pro-Russian path as the only right.

Putin speaks about Ukraine's accession to NATO and the deployment of NATO facilities as “already been decided and just a matter of time” and presents it as “a direct threat to Russia's security,” emphasising that “the risk of a sudden strike at our country will multiply.” “Ballistic missiles from Kharkiv will take seven to eight minutes; and hypersonic assault weapons, four to five minutes. It is like a knife to the throat.” By presenting such

specific data about the proximity of the threat, combining it with the possibility of a “sudden strike” and emphasising it with a simile “knife to the throat,” Putin evokes a feeling of danger that has to be immediately dealt with. He takes an assertive stance talking about these threats, which is manifested in a great number of evidentials such as “obviously” and “as a matter of fact” and references to NATO documents where Russia is, according to him, explicitly proclaimed as “a threat to the Euro-Atlantic security” and, therefore, an enemy.

The “collective West” is explicitly proclaimed as “the geopolitical rival of Russia.” It is depicted as aggressive, hypocritical, not fulfilling promises, and constantly ignoring Russian interests, which is juxtaposed to Russia, which is always playing a fair game and strives to find a compromise. Through the strategy of portrayal in black and white, realized through positive attributions to Russia and negative attributions and derogatory denotations of the West, a sense of moral superiority is created. Sanctions and containment are again brought into the narrative and support the image of “Russia under siege.”

This myth is enforced and extended to “Ukraine under the siege” in order to secure the support of the Kremlin’s actions by the deputies and the citizens, making it sound as if it is Russia’s duty to defend not only its own sovereignty but also to protect the brother people of Ukraine from the malicious intentions of the West.

Quoting the 2021 Ukrainian Military strategy, Putin claims that it “sets out the contours of a potential war” with Russia, which will be waged “with foreign military support.” Since it would be hard to believe that Ukraine would actually attack Russia, a country with nuclear power, Putin creates the myth about nuclear weapons in Ukraine. It cannot but remind us of a similar situation when the US attacked Iraq in 2003 with the excuse of disarming Iraq of weapons of mass destruction (“President Discusses Beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom,” 2003). Interestingly, Putin himself brings up this instance as one of the arguments supporting the narrative of the US “doing whatever they wish,” however, he either doesn’t see the parallel or hopes that the audience will not see it.

As we remember from the first speech, Putin explicitly promised that Russia does not want the partition of Ukraine and will not attempt to annex other regions. Exaggerating the potential threat is, then, a legitimization strategy, presenting the situation as if there was no choice and justifying the need to separate Donbas from Ukraine as the only way to keep NATO away from Russian borders. Claiming that the Ukrainian government is a “puppet regime” Putin implies that Ukraine is not a sovereign state anymore.

Here the colloquial populist manner of speech can be observed again, used to establish common ground with the audience and provide the information in a comprehensible manner. Emotionally loaded language such as “participants of a peaceful protest action were brutally murdered,” “violence, bloodshed, lawlessness,” “terrorists” and other words and

expressions with strong connotations are widely used in the text to invoke an emotional response against the Ukrainian regime in the audience. As Stevenson (1937) explains, such words have a "magnetic effect" and a strong ability to influence decision-making.

The references to knowledge are divided in this text between drawing on “commonly known facts” and claiming to have the exclusive knowledge gained through access to documents and private conversations, which is supposed to create the “they know better” attitude in the audience. Through this intertextuality, Putin attempts to naturalize the idea of the hostility of Ukrainian and Western leaders and to establish the Kremlin’s narratives as truth.

The use of hypophora, a figure of speech in which a speaker asks questions and then answers them, is very typical for Putin. In doing so, he formulates the “painful” questions that some listeners might have or poses questions, which might have not even occurred to the audience but by bringing them into existence he shifts the audience’s attention to the necessary direction. By immediately answering these questions, he aims to establish himself as a wise and knowledgeable man. On the other hand, there are questions addressed to the Ukrainian and Western sides, which obviously cannot be answered at the moment. However, the fact that they remain unanswered creates the effect of cornering the foreign partners.

Accusing Ukraine and the West of exactly the same things he and his administration are guilty of themselves is one of the important traits of Putin’s rhetoric, aiming to shift the attention, for example: “Acts are proliferating that give Ukrainian law enforcement agencies grounds for harsh suppression of freedom of speech, dissent, and persecution of the opposition.”

Russian identity in this speech is constructed mainly through the juxtaposition with “the Other” and through the historical narratives, inextricably intertwining Russian and Ukrainian histories and therefore making Ukraine somehow a part of Russian identity. He blames Ukrainian officials for depriving Russians living in Ukraine of their historical memory, but in this speech, he is doing the same with Ukrainians. He denies Ukrainians the right to their lands, their historical memory and even current political decisions.

Analysis of the news broadcast from February 21[8].

The majority of the news items of the evening news show “Vremya” (“The time”) from that day are dedicated to the situation in Donbas: explosions, attacks of the Military Force of

[8] https://www.1tv.ru/news/2022-02-21/421485-vypusk_programmy_vremya_v_21_00_ot_21_02_2022
For English translation see Appendix 2.2

Ukraine, thousands of refugees (with the emphasis on children, women and elderly) leaving Donetsk and Lugansk to find a shelter in Russia, and the announcement of Vladimir Putin's extraordinary meeting with the Russian Security Council. The presidential speech was broadcasted live in full length within the news programme. The amount of air time dedicated to the situation in Donbas makes it seem the most pressing issue at the moment. There are also many items covering the return of the Russian Olympic team. It is noticeable that the speech of 2014 when the annexation of Crimea was announced also coincided with the triumphant return of the national team from the Paralympic Games.

The way the situation is framed is in line with the official Kremlin agenda. The commentators are not aiming to analyse or independently evaluate the situation but rather to provide a summary of what has been said by the authorities. The same narratives as in the presidential speech can be noticed through the programme: the Ukrainian state as the puppet regime controlled by the USA, and the civilians, "the common people" in Donbas suffering.

However, unlike in the presidential speech, the main focus of the reasoning is not on the historical premises but rather on the current situation in Donbas. "Nationalism" is also not widely used compared to the speech, it is rather the idea of Ukraine being governed by the USA, non-stop bombings of Donbas, suffering civilians and thousands of refugees that are backing the reasoning.

The atmosphere of the news stories is worrisome. The reporters and politicians speak confidently but express preoccupation over the destiny of Donbas. The way the stories are narrated by the news anchor and the reporters is often shifting from a neutral professional tone to judgemental intonations, enforcing the anti-Ukrainian narrative.

The actions of the Ukrainian troops are framed as impudent and breaching the Minsk agreements. The refusal to follow the agreements is strongly emphasised by various speakers, contributing to the narratives of the fraudulent nature of the current Ukrainian regime and Russia as being cheated by its foreign partners. In international relationships, Russia is portrayed as being a scapegoat, it is manifested, for example, in this statement: "Just because since a long time we were appointed as guilty."

The footage and images which are accompanying the narration are a vital part of the discourse. The images of weapons and explosions are taking up a big amount of screen time. They have the same function as previously mentioned loaded language, namely, to trigger certain emotions and influence opinions, since the unambiguous connotation of weapons and explosions evokes feelings of danger and threat. While textual references back the reasoning to a certain degree, the video materials (although they can be manipulated and counterfeit) have even stronger persuasive power, since they are perceived as documented

evidence. The abundance of violent content might influence some people to stop watching the news, therefore contributing to their political passivity.

Another interesting visual representation is the images of the US, Russia and Ukraine, which are used as a background for the narration of the current state of affairs between them. The view of the White House is taken from behind the fence so it looks like the White House is in prison. Moscow's historical buildings are presented in beautiful sunlight. Images of Ukraine represent her as beautiful but gloomy, on a cloudy day.

In the almost two hours news programme there are basically only two topics: the situation in Donbas and sports. The video conference with the Paralympic athletes getting ready for the games is preceding the Presidental speech, and the triumphant return of the Olympic team is closing the programme on a cheerful and festive note. Sports, national identity and nationalism are tightly connected, and international competitions have a particular influence on mobilizing the sense of national identity and uniting the nation (Wenner, 2022). The situation with the Olympic Games also serves as a metaphor for how Russia's place in international relationships is perceived: as marginalized and deprived of certain rights (in the case of the Olympics, the right to compete under the Russian flag due to the doping scandal), but nevertheless strong and proud, and in the end, winning and triumphant.

The narrative of benevolent Russia is also strong, most vividly manifested in the story about the refugees and the way Russians openheartedly accepted them. It is drawing on such an important trait of self-perceived Russian identity as generosity. In the culture and public discourse, this trait is reflected in various proverbs and expressions, for example "[he/she] would give away the last shirt," "Russia is a generous soul" and "the wide Russian soul." The story, describing the ways Russians are helping the refugees - from providing shelters and legal advice to participating in volunteer activism - can allow viewers to feel better about themselves by having an illusion that just by belonging to the Russian nation they are taking part in providing this help.

One of the key narratives of recent times is articulated by one of the passers-by interviewed by the reporter: "How can we leave them behind?." The same message: "We do not leave behind our people" can be also noticed on one of the trucks with humanitarian help. Drawing on the sentiments of duty and honour, this bottom-up narrative, later employed by the propaganda, has become a motto of the war and the main justification for the Russian intervention. The statements about the hostility and cruelty towards Russians that the "Ukrainian nationalists" will certainly show if they manage to take Donbas is another important argument for acknowledging the independence of the People's Republics of Donbas.

In many instances during the programme the focus is brought to the children: in the story about the bombarded school, in mentioning children studying in the basements, and in the story about the refugees. The image of children under a threat is a powerful tool to activate the natural protective instinct in adults and to influence public opinion towards accepting the necessity of the actions undertaken.

The channel is framing the situation in Donbas as a pressing issue, calling for immediate actions, which were confidently undertaken by the Russian authorities and the President. The structure of the programme creates the impression that the issue was managed quickly and decisively, basically while the programme was unfolding.

The narrative of Russian sovereignty being threatened by Ukraine and the West is explicit. Politicians speaking at the Security Council Meeting are articulating it in different ways, for example, by accusing Ukraine of having plans to become a nuclear power. The news anchor claims that "By now Ukraine was inflated with weapons. There are no questions about what it is for, it is clear without words."

One of the key narratives inherent to both Presidential speech and the news programme is the constant emphasis on the West and Ukraine as not committing to their obligations and breaking their promises, and Russia, on the other hand, as always honest, transparent and constructive. This narrative aims to inflate the sentiment of the moral superiority of the Russian nation and justify the lack of international cooperation due to its alleged pointlessness.

Looking for what is absent in this news programme and the other news items broadcasted on that day, we can notice that there are no mentions of the internal problems in Russia as if they did not exist. Distracting citizens' attention from internal issues by focusing on external is a common political strategy.

6. Discussion

"With words like 'the people' or 'the country' we seek to demarcate a totality by ascribing it an objective content. But the totality remains an imaginary entity"
(Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 13).

In this chapter, I move to the macro-level of analysis by applying Laclau and Mouffe's conceptual framework, and while doing so I will discuss how the national identity is being constructed.

Analysing two speeches from different years allows for looking at the national identity in its dynamics. There are certainly some patterns that are persistent in both of the speeches, such as imperialist nostalgia, the narrative of the inseparability of Russian and Ukrainian histories, the narrative of historical injustice and the West as an antagonist. However, compared to the 2014 speech, in 2022, the trend to portray the West in a negative light has significantly intensified: the image of the West is even more vilified, and imbued with feelings of danger and threat. It reflects the overall dynamics and increased tension in Russia-West relationships for the past eight years, and, inter alia, channels the feelings of anger and humiliation caused by sanctions, taking the form of narrative revenge.

Another pattern, common for both speeches, is manifested in the texture of the texts, as they are both organized in the same way: by starting with the long history lessons, proceeding with an elaborated description of the threat and concluding with appealing to the politicians and people to ratify the territorial alternation. This structure enforces the persuasiveness of the speeches in that it first constructs the identity and then, by posing a threat to it, ensures that it gets activated and internalized.

The speeches and corresponding news items can be seen as articulations, creating and promoting certain discourses by fixing elements as moments in a temporary closure. Seeing these speeches as a part of an intertextual chain, I apply Laclau and Mouffe's conceptual framework to both at the same time, trying to understand the meta-narrative of the national identity as created by Putin.

"A nation" is an empty sign in itself, a floating signifier, referring to totality, and therefore, a myth. Struggling to establish his interpretation of society as dominant, Putin imbues it with certain content, competing with other interpretations within the order of discourse. There are three main myths that Putin employs and develops: "Russia," "Ukraine" and "the West." Though "the West" is certainly not a nation, in Putin's rhetoric it becomes a uniform totality.

In the construction of Russian national identity, where "Russia," or "Russianness," is the master signifier, identity is formed through relations between signifiers that form a chain of equivalence. The elements of identity, that served as a thematic matrix for my analysis can be also seen as elements embedded with a particular meaning and fixed as moments around the nodal point "Russia," forming a chain of equivalence. National identity is a big and complex phenomenon, therefore, I see it as a multilayered construction, where the moments, forming a macro-chain of equivalence for the national identity, are themselves formed by

micro-chains of signifiers, that are crystallised meanings, formed, in turn, by their own chains.

This construction can be seen as an equation (or imagined as a fishing net):

Russia =

Historical memory = (Kyiv Rus + *imperial grandeur* + *sacred Crimea* + *Ukraine* + *Orthodoxy)*

+

Russians, or mythical "We" = (*unity* + *multiculturality* + *family* + *fairness* + *benevolence* + *empathy*)

+

National body = (*home* + *Crimea* + *divided* + *"besieged fortress"*)

+

Trauma = (*historical injustice* + *robbed* + *cheated)*

As can be seen, certain beliefs and opinions are discursively included in the identity, and through the mythical "we" propagated as common sense.

Identification with collective memory is an important factor motivating people to accept and reproduce their national identity. Putin in his speeches cherrypicks particular "memories" that together create an image of a great country with a long and rich history. The fact that Russia and Ukraine have the same myth of origin, Kyiv Rus, and alleged spiritual connection through Orthodoxy, helps him to intertwine two histories and, in accordance with the Russophile school of history, depict Ukraine as a subaltern nation in the "triune" All-Russian nation.

Sharafutdinova (2020) is mainly drawing on the Soviet Union as a foundation determining Putin's contemporary identity and state politics. However, she is omitting a significant detail: the role of Orthodox Christianity in Russian identity formation. During the Soviet time, the Church was marginalised and, at some point, forbidden. Therefore Putin's attempt to construct Russian identity is based on a more complex background and rooted in the deeper past.

Internalizing a certain identity allows people to make sense of the events and avoid antagonisms. Putin's articulations are hegemonic interventions, striving to dissolve antagonisms between competing discourses by reestablishing unambiguity. By constructing the image of Russia as a "besieged fortress", Putin dissolves the antagonism between the discourses "Russia is good" and "Russia as an aggressor," since a besieged one cannot be an aggressor.

The national identity is also created through the logic of difference with The Other (*the West* + *Ukrainian nationalists*).

Putin discursively constructs not only Russian identity, but Ukrainian as well. It is split and constructed through two chains of equivalence:

1. *Ukrainian authorities = nationalists = crime = impostors = illegitimate = puppets of the West*
2. *Ukrainians = brothers = voiceless = robbed*

This divide explains the conceptualization of the war as a “special operation.” The fact that thousands of Russians have relatives and friends in Ukraine means that openly proclaiming the war could cause a strong antagonism and provoke a wave of protests. But targeting the “special operation” towards the “nationalists who usurped the power” frames the situation as fighting not only for Russians in Ukraine but also for “brothers Ukrainians,” who are “suffering.” Perhaps, Putin himself truly believed in that and therefore was sure that the “special operation” would finish in three days. As we know, he was wrong.

Nationalism is an important concept in Putin’s rhetoric, used to demarcate Ukrainian authorities from the Ukrainian people. He often equates it with nazism and fascism to evoke from historical memory the image of the enemy and activate the sense of national identity, based on the victory in World War II. This memory is saturated at the same time with hatred, sorrow and pride. Death and the dead, as Anderson argues, play an important part in forming the national identity. That explains how World War II became one of the centrepieces of Russian identity, embodied in countless monuments and cenotaphs.

However, while Putin condemns Ukrainian nationalism and fights (or pretends to fight) domestic Russian nationalism, his own rhetoric is nationalist too. But since nationalism in its classical form is incompatible with a multiethnic country, it takes the form of an imperial nationalism (Паин, 2015). It is manifested in essentialism, drawing on particular eternal cultural properties of the Russian people, fundamentally distinguishing them from other peoples, particularly the Western. This juxtaposition between “us” and “them” creates a sense of uniqueness and moral superiority of Russians as a nation. The imperial protective character of Putin’s nationalism is demonstrated in his rhetoric about the need to “protect” the former territory of the empire as if it was still part of it. Finally, though Putin emphasises that Russia is a multicultural country, he still assumes the right of ethnic Russians to political dominance. Drawing on presumed antiquity, he strives to create a sense of community “to die for.”

“The collective West” identity is constructed through a chain of equivalence: *the West = exceptionalism = arrogance = puppeteers = cheating = aggression = danger = weapons*. This image challenges the order of discourse where the West is constructed through the chain *the West = civilisation = liberal democracy = human rights*.

By using terms such as “bipolar/unipolar world,” “Cold War,” “policy of containment” and later, in the speech from February 24, “empire of lies,” Putin takes the stance of conventional geopolitics. As O’ Tuathail (1996) argues, politicians not only reflect on existing differences but also produce differences. By demarcating the world, ascribing certain qualities to juxtaposed counterparts, and sticking the simplified labels to complicated processes and phenomena, Putin provides Russians with a named and territorialized enemy.

History and geography are inextricably intertwined in Putin’s rhetoric. As Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce (in Kordan, 2022) argues, all history can be understood as contemporary history since no matter how remote the historical events are, history serves present needs and situations. “Narrating the past, therefore, is never “innocent business” (Kordan, 2022, p. 163). Interpreting and manipulating history, persistently framing previous territorial changes as a “robbery” and delegitimising them, Putin seeks to promote his map and explanation of the world as accurate. He equates Russian territory to the territory of the Russian Empire and USSR, geo-graphing a new spacial order and legitimizing his territorial claims. The alleged necessity to protect Russians, facing russophobia and marginalisation in Ukraine and crystallized in the slogan “We don’t let our people behind,” adds to these claims. By discursively extending “our people” to “the body” of another nation, Putin justifies his interference in Ukrainian politics. Metaphorically speaking, the “body of the nation” was cut and it hurts, and Putin, as a surgeon, is sewing back these missing parts of the body.

Putin’s speeches are characterized by a high interdiscursivity and intertextuality, such as quoting documents and historical books, which helps him gain validity and credibility. Combining it with emotionally loaded language, Putin creates a vivid image of the threat, enforcing the strategy of unification. This persistent narrative aims to mobilize the national identity and make it overdetermine other identities. Creating certain geopolitical imaginations, Putin not so much reflects on the actual differences but rather creates them in the mass consciousness. His speeches have a great impact on the discourse of “Russianness” since they serve as a guideline for the official media discourse, which affects a worldview of a significant part of the population.

Print media, according to Anderson, aid in constructing nations by providing people with a sense of shared experience and collective identity, and the same can be applied to television. By propagating certain discourses through state-controlled mass media and systematically banning oppositional media, authorities strive to establish these discourses as objective. The First channel, reproducing official narratives and projecting the national identity, determined by the official ideology, serves as a means for nation-building. By channelling the official narratives in a way that is more comprehensible to an average viewer and often interviewing “common people,” the media strive to frame certain attitudes and opinions as common sense.

Propaganda, to be credible, needs to have a grain of truth, so it is rather a distorted reality rather than a lie. It is a half-truth, based on manipulation, interpretation and exaggeration of facts. To internalize the ideas, spread by propaganda, a person needs to have a certain mindset, and a readiness to accept these ideas and images. Here comes the national identity, narrated in a certain way and internalized by the population, serving as a fruitful ground for the seeds of propaganda.

After the crash of the Soviet Union, Russia is still struggling to find its new identity. As was discussed in the introduction, Russian identity is fragmented and not well-developed. Strong regional identities, which can develop into separatist movements, are perceived by Putin as a threat to the country's territorial integrity, therefore, he seeks to offer Russians a unifying common identity. In reality, however, this identity is not quite inclusive. Ensuring a strong sense of national identity in the context of the war was particularly crucial for Putin since he had to be sure that people would willingly die "for the sake of the nation." A "saviour identity," that Putin offers, perfectly resonates with Orthodox Christianity as one of the main pillars of cultural politics. The willingness to sacrifice one's life for others, to be a martyr, is the greatest Christian virtue. However, speaking about Orthodoxy as a cultural basis of the Russian nation, he excludes millions of Muslims who live in Russia.

Putin's narration of Russian identity is somehow paradoxical: it is saturated at the same time with the sentiments of humiliation and greatness. Combining in his rhetoric narratives of bereavement caused by the crash of the USSR, insult caused by the West's disrespect, a sentiment of imperial nostalgia and aiming to personify a strong and decisive leader who is ready to act, he promises a rebirth of a great nation. He offers a national identity, embedded with greatness but threatened by "the other."

The nation operates as an emotional anchor and provides identity. Russian citizens, experiencing the lack of actual political power under the authoritarian regime, are attracted to the image of a great empire, which propaganda is offering to them. Belonging to this empire can give them an illusory feeling of glory and power, substituting the lack of actual power.

Russian identity in these speeches is anthropomorphised through personifications: it has a heart and a soul, a mother and a brother, and a house with a fence. What about the father, then? Perhaps, Putin sees himself as a father of the nation. Or, perhaps, by almost never using "I" and speaking from the collective "we" he rather identifies himself with the nation? Criticising former Soviet and Russian leaders, he implicitly proclaims that he is finally the strong and decisive leader that Russia was waiting for, satisfying hopes for a "wise czar" and a "strong hand" inherent to what Pain (Паин, 2015) calls "imperial consciousness." Imperial consciousness only comes to life in the masses if it is purposefully activated by

political forces, and Putin's speeches can be seen as a such force. He appears as a classic patriarch, carrying the nation on his shoulders.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to deconstruct the process of Russian identity manufacturing in President Putin's speeches and evaluate how it is reflected in the news items broadcasted on one of the main Russian TV channels, The First. Additionally, it sought to understand how this constructed identity aids in legitimizing aggression against Ukraine.

Taking as a starting point Benedict Anderson's understanding of the nation as an "imagined community," this thesis treated the national identity as a discursive construct and engaged with Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Analysis and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. It revealed that Putin's rhetoric revolves around three main myths: "Russia," "Ukraine," and "the West," which are constructed in relation and opposition to each other. Russian national identity appeared as a complex, multilayered construction, built through a chain of equivalence, consisting of moments such as historical memory, mythical "we," the national body, and trauma. Historical memory takes the leading role in this construction, providing Russians with the sense of a great, strong and proud nation with deep roots.

The role of "the other" in constructing Russian national identity is of high importance. By juxtaposing Russia to "the West" Putin ascribes to Russia such qualities as benevolence, honesty, generosity and kindness. Creating the image of a "besieged fortress" Putin shifts the blame for the conflict to the West and Ukraine, and frames his actions as a defence and not aggression. External threat demands a strong leader to deal with it, and Putin positions himself as such a leader, who is ready to "carry the nation on his shoulders." By doing this he strives to secure his position in power.

While at the beginning of my research I was mainly interested in how the Russian identity is constructed, after conducting the analysis, I realised that Putin's rhetoric, especially in the second speech, deals to a high extent with the Ukrainian identity, which he presents as weak and split. Delegitimizing the Ukrainian national body as randomly constructed at the whim of former Soviet leaders and depriving Ukrainians of their historical memory, while at the same time stating that we are the same people, he aims to blur the borders in order to legitimize the annexation of territories.

Geographical and historical knowledge (as any other) is never innocent, it is permeated with power struggles, it is a discursive battlefield. By employing historical narratives, Putin attempts to legitimize his territorial claims, geo-graphing new spatial order and striving to establish his map as true.

The First Channel, as analysis shows, does not attempt to challenge the official narrative, and serves as a propaganda tool, adapting the message to the wider audience and seeking to affect the audience on an emotional level. War and sports are powerful tools to activate national identity, and by dedicating most of the air time to covering the stories from

Donbas and the success of the Olympics team, the First Channel seeks to do it. Interviews with "common people" on the streets help to present certain attitudes and opinions as not imposed by the state but "bottom up," natural and commonsense.

This research contributes to the scholarship concerned with national identities and discourses. In light of Saner's concept of overidentification, I find the ability to distance from identity and critically evaluate it extremely important. The knowledge that serves as a basis for identity construction is always saturated with power relations, and awareness about it can aid a more critical attitude towards "objective reality" and help to "remain a real person" (Saner 1986, in Wodak et al, 2009, p. 17).

This thesis was focused on the construction of Russian identity by authorities, however, in order to paint a more complete picture and understand the role that national identity plays in making sense of the invasion, it is necessary to examine how this construction is internalized by the population. While there is a certain correlation between the invasion of Ukraine and Putin's popularity, it is not clear to what extent the sense of national identity contributes to it. Therefore, I call for qualitative research to investigate how Russians' perception and conceptualisation of their national identity have been affected by the war and by the official rhetoric.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, both Russia and Ukraine had to rediscover who they are and create their new identities. And while the war still continues, looks like Ukraine already won - by choosing the future, and not the past, unlike Russia. I would like to believe that one day Russia will start to build its identity not based on what it is "not" but what it is.

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