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# RUSSIA VERSUS “HITLER-GERMANY” AND “GAY-WEST”

Cultural History and Political Technology in Defence  
of a Besieged Fortress

Tuomas Taavila

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Uppsats/Examensarbete:	15 hp
Program och/eller kurs:	Språk och interkulturell kommunikation (ryska)
Nivå:	Avancerad nivå
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Handledare:	Svetlana Polsky
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## Abstract

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Against the background of deteriorated relations between Russia and the West, this study conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis on the Russian nation-building project, facilitated by official rhetoric and state-controlled television. The essay starts with an examination of the cultural roots of a Russian ‘national idea’ and shows how these are present in today’s context. Further, it aims to determine characteristics of the inter-discourse communication between the elites and the majority.

In an interdisciplinary approach, the study draws from literature on Russian cultural and political history, media and propaganda studies, and political science.

The findings of the study demonstrate that the Russian national idea can be viewed to comprise of a horizontal and a vertical dichotomy, i.e. of Russia’s oftentimes-problematic relationship to its surroundings and a special bond between Russian rulers and the Russian population. Both dichotomies feature strongly in both official rhetoric and state-television. What regards specific characteristics of the inter-discourse communication, the findings point to a specific vanguard mentality of the elites, the prevalence of state-propaganda, and, lastly, a ‘typical Russian’ practice of shaping one’s worldview with reference to past events. In conclusion, Russia is imagined as a besieged fortress defending itself against, primarily, the Western Other.

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## 1. Introduction

I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.<sup>1</sup>

- Winston Churchill (1939)

To many an observer – and it matters not whether one was of the Russophobe, Russophile or “neutral” type – Russia oftentimes seems to work in mysterious ways. The famous quote by Winston Churchill simultaneously gives voice to this mysterious character, but also includes an insightful clue: Russia’s national interest. When Churchill uttered these reflections in a BBC broadcast to the British people on October 1, 1939, the global community found itself but at an early stage of the Second World War, and the agenda of the Soviet Union was still shrouded in uncertainty. But that was subject to change. After German Chancellor Adolf Hitler on June 22, 1941, launched an invasion of the Soviet Union, the formidable Red Army sided with the Allied Powers and, eventually, after the demise of an estimated 26,6 million Soviet citizens,<sup>2</sup> contributed most significantly to the Allied Victory in May 1945. The remembrance and mythification of the Great Patriotic War (Velikaja Otečestvennaja vojna<sup>3</sup>), as the war is signified in Russia, would later become an integral part in the project of constructing a Soviet identity.<sup>4</sup> Today, this historical set of events continues to play a crucial role in Russian state-run identity politics.

Instead of attempting to identify specific national interests, this study will aim for the root of the issue and ask questions about the conceptualization of the Russian nation itself. Here, Anderson’s (2006) conceptualization of nations as *imagined communities*<sup>5</sup> should make for a cornerstone of the following reflections. As to the elements constituting the ‘imagined community’ of Russia, I believe the relation of Russia and the West to be key. And what current Russian-Western relations are concerned, one often gets to hear parallels drawn to the Cold War between the United States and the

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, W., & Rhodes James, R. (1974). *Winston S. Churchill: His complete speeches, 1897-1963. Vol. 6, 1935-1942*, p. 6161

<sup>2</sup> Estimates regarding the losses of the Soviet Union in the Second World War show a great deal of variation and remain, until today, a subject of scholarly debate. Here, I refer to the number of officially confirmed deaths as indicated by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation. Cf. Ministerstvo oborony Rossijskoj Federacij (2017). *K voprosu o poterjach protivoborstvujuščich storon na sovetsko-germanskom fronte v gody Velikoj Otečestvennoj vojny: pravda i vymysel*. Retrieved 28. Mar. 2019 from <http://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/history/more.htm?id=11359251@cmsArticle>.

<sup>3</sup> During the course of this study, the transliteration of Russian names and terms will be based on the ISO 9:1995 system of transliteration of Cyrillic characters into Latin characters.

<sup>4</sup> See Snyder, T. (2018). *The road to unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. New York, NY: Tim Duggan Books, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> See Anderson, B. (2006, 1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. ed.). London: Verso, pp. 6-7.

Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> Although the differences between the current confrontation course and that of during the Cold War are manifold, one of the major battlegrounds continues to be located in information space, manifesting itself as the war for people's minds. Here, Trenin's (2016) comparative reflections are telling:

The absence of an iron curtain makes information space a prime battlefield in the new competition between the Russian state-run propaganda and the Western mainstream media. This still largely open space makes this 24/7 battle extremely dynamic and particularly ruthless, with virtually no holds barred. Information is no longer suppressed, but it is sometimes impossible to tell truth from falsehood.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.1. Aim(s), method and material

Inspired by Trenin's quote, this study is set to explore the discourse of the Russian nation-building project, facilitated by state-controlled media. Thus, I intend to perform a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on a state-sponsored TV-show – Dmitrij Kiselëv's Sunday news show *Vesti nedeli* (News of the Week) – with the aim of examining the style in which the Russian nation is imagined. More precisely, I intend to focus on 'distinctive vocabularies' used and, more importantly, specific narratives being disseminated.<sup>8</sup> What the national narratives are concerned, this study has picked the narrative of Russia as a *besieged fortress* (*osaždennaja krepost'*) as one of its central pieces.<sup>9</sup> That is to say, Russia is imagined being under siege, under constant attack – and has been so for close to a thousand years.

What the field and method of CDA is concerned, the present study understands it as “a form of discourse analysis that focuses on the ways in which discourses serve as means of social and

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g., Trenin, D. (2016). *Should we fear Russia?* Cambridge [etc.]: Polity Press, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Trenin, D. (2016). *Should we fear Russia?* Cambridge [etc.]: Polity Press, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Here, the study by Pynnöniemi & Rácz (2016) on the Russian information operations in Ukraine will guide my methodological reflections. Cf. Pynnöniemi, K. & Rácz, A. (2016). *The fog of falsehood: Russian strategy of deception and the conflict in Ukraine (FIIA Report 45)*. Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Retrieved from <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/fog-of-falsehood>. I will expand on the concept of distinctive vocabularies in Chapter 3.2.

<sup>9</sup> This ideological construction figures dominantly in studies on Russian ideology and studies on Russian security. See e.g., Lipman, M. (2015). Putin's 'besieged fortress' and its ideological arms. In: M. Lipman & N. Petrov (eds.), *The state of Russia: What comes next?* (pp. 110-136). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Pynnöniemi, K. and Kari, M. (2016). *Russia's new Information Security Doctrine: Guarding a besieged cyber fortress (FIIA Comment 26)*. Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Retrieved from <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/russias-new-information-security-doctrine>; Ostrovsky, A. (2017). *The invention of Russia: The rise of Putin and the age of fake news*. New York: Viking Penguin, p. 307; Zygar', M. (2016). *All the Kremlin's men: Inside the court of Vladimir Putin*. Translation by T. Hodson. New York, NY: PublicAffairs, pp. 102-07.

political domination.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, CDA is often conceptualized as an interdisciplinary approach, interested in “studying ideology in discourse.”<sup>11</sup> Connecting to this, it is my firm belief that when dealing with a highly elusive concept as the ‘imagined community’ of Russia, one needs a deeper understanding of the historical, cultural and political developments that shape today’s context. Hence, a thorough contextualisation shall precede the analysis of Kiselëv’s TV-show. In respect to this enterprise, paper wants to pay tribute to the reflections of Sakwa who in his most recent study, *Russia’s futures* (2019), advocates viewing contemporary Russia as a multi-planed reality incorporating multiple pasts.<sup>12</sup> Based on this observation, I want to mark that the present analysis only can incorporate a number of these pasts to the story being told and should, therefore, be regarded as far from complete.

Assuming, further, that Russian state-controlled media functions as an amplifier of the state’s message to the people, I during the contextualisation intend to review a number of statements and speeches by Vladimir Putin, as well as a recent text by Vladislav Surkov, a central Kremlin strategist, focusing on ideological and discursive content. Thus, the second aim of this study consists of presenting and pinpointing the state’s perspective on matters regarding a possible Russian national idea. Thus and so, even the contextualisation will be fused with critical analysis of Russian national discourse.

Against these backgrounds, the study will base on the following research questions:

- 1) What are the historical and cultural roots of Russia’s ‘national idea’ and how are these present in today’s context?
- 2) What are the hallmarks of the inter-discourse communication between the state and the Russian population?

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<sup>10</sup> Critical Discourse Analysis. (2012). In: N.M. Seel (ed.). *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*. Boston, MA: Springer. This dictionary entry refers to the work of Norman Fairclough, a pioneer within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis. Cf. Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, R. (2012). *Discourse analysis: A resource book for students* (Routledge English language introductions). Abingdon: Routledge, p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Sakwa, R. (2019). *Russia’s futures*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, p. 8.

## 2. Contextualisation of Russian national discourse

Умом Россию не понять,  
Аршином общим не измерить:  
У ней особенная стать —  
В Россию можно только верить.  
- Федор Тютчев (1866)<sup>13</sup>

With the mind alone Russia cannot be understood,  
No ordinary yardstick spans her greatness:  
She stands alone, unique –  
In Russia one can only believe.  
- Fëdor Tjutčëv (1866)<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately for this study, Russian poet and diplomat Tjutčëv voiced these thoughts way before that, for example, the grand project of the Soviet Union would leave its mark on the Russian soul. Be that as it may, I shall not shy away from the daunting task ahead and propose following the red threads provided by the above research questions and the narrative of the besieged fortress.

### 2.1. Terms and definitions

Before diving into Russian cultural and political history, however, some relevant terms require defining. Showing a great deal of overlap and interdependence, this study presents to you: nation, national identity, narrative, ideology, mediasphere, and propaganda.

As to what constitutes a *nation*, this paper suggests approaching it in Anderson's terms. Thus, "a nation is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."<sup>15</sup> Nations are 'imagined' "because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."<sup>16</sup> Anderson even offers a further tool for analysis: "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are

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<sup>13</sup> Tjutčëv, F. (1866). *Umom Rossiju ne ponjat'....* In: Internet biblioteka Alekseja Komarova. Retrieved 17. May 2019 from <https://ilibrary.ru/text/1276/p.1/index.html>.

<sup>14</sup> The English translation of Tjutčëv's above verse is retrieved from Billington (1970), cf. Billington, J. (1970). *The icon and the axe: An interpretive history of Russian culture*. New York: Vintage books, p. 320. Furthermore, both the introductory quote by Churchill and Tjutčëv's poem feature in an article of Stefan Hedlund (2006). In said article, Hedlund analyses long-term developments in Russia and, importantly, can be seen to warn against the practice of approaching Russia as a mythical Other – a guideline this essay intends to take to heart. Cf. Hedlund, S. (2006). Vladimir the great, Grand Prince of Muscovy: Resurrecting the Russian service state. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58(5), p. 776.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson (2006), p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

imagined.”<sup>17</sup> And it is precisely this *style*, by which the Russian nation is imagined into being, that this paper will try to examine and pinpoint more closely.<sup>18</sup>

Touching on these reflections and, further, against the background of television broadcasts composing the primary linguistic data, I suggest approaching *national identity* as defined in the *Dictionary of Media and Communication* (2011), according to which it makes for

*[t]he public image of an imagined community [...], projecting an illusion of unity reflected symbolically in a flag, a national anthem, and distinctive rituals, and culturally represented in discourse primarily via historical mythologies and a popular cultural canon (including iconic images), narratively constructed and transmitted by social institutions, in particular the educational system (see also cultural literacy) and the mass media (notably in national news and in media events).*<sup>19</sup>

Against this background, the concept of *narrative* requires further defining. Drawing from Holmström (2015), a narrative

describes the past, justifies the present and presents a vision of the future. It offers a framework for the plot and the setting of a story. It provides context for raw information and facts, and helps to shape how we perceive ourselves and the world in which we live.<sup>20</sup>

Next on and in close connection: *ideology*. What this immaterial source material of many and more confrontations throughout human history is concerned, this paper suggests drawing from Lipman’s (2015) reflections about the pervasive notion in question:

The term ‘ideology’ [...] refers to the ‘sphere for ideas and symbols’ rather than a cohesive doctrine. It is a blurred sphere that encompasses values, symbols, rhetorical formulas, elements of national identity, ideological, ethical, and esthetical concepts that determine one’s perception of events and of the reality as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Anderson (2006), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> I have used Anderson’s terms in an earlier study as well, as I reflected on the role of Russian authors Dostojevskij and Puškin as nation-builders, viz., Taavila, T. (2017). *Imperial rhetoric and the Finnish Other in Russian literature in selected works of Aleksandr Puškin and Fëdor Dostojevskij* (Master’s thesis, first cycle). Göteborg: Institutionen för språk och litteraturer. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/52595>.

<sup>19</sup> Chandler, D., & Munday, R. (2011). national identity. In: *A dictionary of media and communication* (First ed.). Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press. Retrieved 17. Apr. 2019 from <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199568758.001.0001/acref-9780199568758-e-1834>. The emphases added I deem especially relevant for the study at hand. Viz., Taavila (2017).

<sup>20</sup> Holmström, M. (2015.) The narrative and social media. *Defence Strategic Communication*. The official journal of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Vol. 1, No. 1., Winter 2015. Retrieved 8. May 2019 from [https://www.psywar.org/psywar/reproductions/Defence\\_Strategic\\_Communications\\_Issue\\_1.pdf](https://www.psywar.org/psywar/reproductions/Defence_Strategic_Communications_Issue_1.pdf), p. 120, cited from Pynnöniemi & Rác (2016), p. 55.

<sup>21</sup> Lipman (2015), p. 111. Lipman bases her interpretation of the term on the work of Ol’ga Malinova (2011), who suggests this term be applied to political ideas and public perception of politics in post-Soviet Russia, see Malinova, O. (2011). Vvedenie. In: O. Malinova (ed.). *Idejno-simvoličeskoe prostranstvo postsovetskoj Rossii: dinamika, institucional’naja sreda, aktory*. Moskva: Rosspen. Retrieved 16. Apr. 2019 from <https://publications.hse.ru/en/chapters/68293935>.

The conception of ideology as a ‘blurred sphere’ should prove to be of applicability to our study, in that it allows ideology being examined as something malleable and flexible, where building blocks can be removed from the construction, added to it, and altered. Furthermore, it seems as if these closely connected notions, such as nation and ideology, presuppose mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>22</sup>

Leaning on the CDA approach, I further want to mark Habermas’ (1974) conception of *mediasphere*, which describes “the place where language becomes ‘a medium of domination and social force’<sup>23</sup> [...] and where discourse has social consequences and ideological effects.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, it is here where the elusive concept of *propaganda* comes into play. The concept is elusive because the definition of propaganda “is not static but has evolved in response to political and historical developments.”<sup>25</sup> I intend here only to make a preliminary approach, so that after having provided the necessary Russian context, I can aim at pinpointing it more closely. More can be said at this point, however, about the more general context that propaganda requires. Stanley (2015), for example, sees the context provided by *flawed ideologies* as a prerequisite for effective propaganda. “When societies are unjust, for example, in the distribution of wealth, we can expect the emergence of flawed ideologies.”<sup>26</sup> And according to the annual Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report (2018), Russia figures as the most unequal country in the world in terms of exactly that, the distribution of wealth.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, as there exist different contextual differences for an understanding of propaganda, one could assert the same for the intention of respective propagandists. In 1928, Bernays defined propaganda as an instrument to “bring order out of chaos.”<sup>28</sup> He did, however, also identify “the existence of the opposite type of propaganda: the manipulation of public sentiments with the aim to facilitate and create chaos instead of order.”<sup>29</sup>

Equipped with these terms and definitions, let us now embark upon a quest towards a Russian national idea.

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<sup>22</sup> See e.g., Jones (2012), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Habermas, J. (1974). *Theory and practice*. Translation by J. Viertel. London: Heinemann. Cited from Pasitselska (2017). In: Pasitselska, O. (2017). Ukrainian crisis through the lens of Russian media: Construction of ideological discourse. *Discourse & Communication*, 11(6), p. 592.

<sup>24</sup> What the part about discourse having social consequences and ideological effects is concerned, Pasitselska has drawn from the research of Jef Verschueren, cf. Verschueren, J. (2015). Ideology in discourse. In: K. Tracy (ed.). *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*. Hoboken: NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 1-10.

<sup>25</sup> Pynnöniemi & Rácz (2016), p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> Stanley, J. (2015). *How propaganda works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> See Credit Suisse Research Institute (2018). *Global Wealth Report 2018*. [online] Zürich, Switzerland. Retrieved 5. May 2019 from <https://www.credit-suisse.com/corporate/en/research/research-institute/global-wealth-report.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Bernays, E. (1928). *Propaganda*. New York: Horace Liveright, p. 159, cited from Pynnöniemi & Rácz (2016), p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

## 2.2. Towards a Russian national idea

### 2.2.1. Russia and the West

Against the introductory reflections on the new Cold War between Russia and the West, I in what follows intend to draw from Jangfeldt's (2017) long essay on Russia as an 'idea' – carrying the striking title *Us and Them*.<sup>30</sup> According to Jangfeldt, the horizontal dichotomy between Russia and the West, i.e. between 'us' and 'them', makes for a centuries-long tradition in Russian cultural and political history.<sup>31</sup> In addition to this horizontal dichotomy, Jangfeldt further points to a vertical one – the unique relationship between (the) ruler(s) and the ruled<sup>32</sup> – a relationship I will scrutinize more closely in the next subchapter. Regarding the horizontal dichotomy, Jangfeldt further denotes that ever since the times of tsar Pëtr I, i.e. Peter the Great (1672-1725), the 'Tsar-Westernizer', and up until today with Vladimir Putin at the reins, the relationship of Russia and Europe has divided the country, its rulers, thinkers, and people. The contraposition between, on one hand, those who see Russia's only feasible path forward in a rapprochement with the West and, on the other, those who advocate a unique 'Russian path', Jangfeldt observes, makes for a constant phenomenon in the country's history.<sup>33</sup>

What, then, can be said about the origins of the 'Russian idea'? According to Jangfeldt, it was under the thirty-year iron rule of tsar Nikolaj I (1825-55) that the Russian idea, here in its horizontal forming, was born. The idea manifested itself in the conceptualization of Russia and the West as antipodes. Thus, Russia constitutes a civilization essentially different from and, thereby, oftentimes viewed as superior to its Western counterpart.<sup>34</sup> Against this background, I feel it is time to introduce the discursive practice of *othering* to the agenda, a key method when it comes to defining one's own self against the 'Other.' Here, I intend to adhere to Outinen's (2016) definition, which conveniently links the term to Anderson's 'imagined communities':

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<sup>30</sup> Jangfeldt, B. (2017). *Vi och dom: Om Ryssland som idé*. Litauen: Wahlström & Widstrand.

<sup>31</sup> To be more precise, Jangfeldt makes use of the Swedish term 'motsatspar', which literally translates to 'pair(s) of opposites' but, also, can be translated to 'dichotomy/dichotomies', cf. See Jangfeldt, (2017), p. 85. I have here settled for the translation of 'motsatspar' to 'dichotomy' due to the wish of partly approaching them as *processes*. According to *Merriam-Webster*, for example, a dichotomy is known to denote "a division into two especially mutually exclusive or contradictory groups or entities" but, what is more, can even be understood as "the process of making such a division." In: *Dichotomy*. (2019). In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved 11. Jun 2019 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dichotomy>.

<sup>32</sup> See Jangfeldt, (2017), p. 85.

<sup>33</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> See Jangfeldt (2017), p. 85; see also Gerner, K. (2011). *Ryssland: En europeisk civilisationshistoria*. Lund: Historiska media.

[O]thering can be seen as an imagined identity politics for a given ideological and political aim. Othering is the discourse to describe a number of human things, lands, groups, cultures, religions, manners etc., by using comparison and difference, and hence by using hierarchy and value judgements. It is often the easiest way to form a priori essentialist coherence in a fuzzy world and even fuzzier past.<sup>35</sup>

As to why Western Europe came to be viewed in this negative light, I suggest turning to the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church and, especially, its relationship to its Western cousins for answers. In 1054, the East-West Schism, i.e. the formal break-up within the Christian Church, occurred, resulting in the separation of the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Church. Thus, the perception of fundamental differences between East and West was implanted into Russian culture, as church history specialist Bodin (2016) aptly points out.<sup>36</sup> What is more, the perception of the teachings of the Western Church being synonymous to heresy and the belief of Western civilization in general being on the wrong path would over the years grow strongly in Russia.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.2.2. Of rulers and ruled

Much like with the formation of its horizontal cousin, the formulation of the special bond between Russia's rulers and its population would carry the stamp of Nikolaj I or, to be more precise, that of his minister of education, Sergej Uvarov (1786-1855). Originally being tasked with crafting new educational reforms, Uvarov soon saw his model morphing into the defining ideological slogans of the reign of Nikolaj I and, further, into official state-ideology. Pointing to Russia's exceptional position amongst world cultures and defining what is good for Russia and its people, Uvarov would come to cement the iconic triad of Russian imperial statehood, comprising of the notions of *pravoslavie* (Orthodoxy), *samoderžavie* (Autocracy), and *narodnost'* (Nationality).<sup>38</sup> According to Jangfeldt, it comes as no surprise that the ideological tenet of *pravoslavie* should stand in first place, further adding to the importance of the Orthodox Church in the context of Russian nation-building. In Jangfeldt's words: The Church 'has always predicated self-denial and submission before God

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<sup>35</sup> Outinen, J. (2016). What Went Wrong in the Stories of Otherness? Finnish Soldiers of the Russo-Turkish War on the Road to Crushing Political Borders and Crossing Cultural Barriers, 1877-1878. *Ennen ja nyt*, 2016/01. Retrieved 23. Apr. 2019 from <http://www.ennenjanyt.net/2016/02/what-went-wrong-in-the-stories-of-otherness-finnish-soldiers-of-the-russo-turkish-war-on-the-road-to-crushing-political-borders-and-crossing-cultural-barriers-1877-1878/>; viz., Taavila 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Bodin, P. (2016). *Ryssland och Europa: En kulturhistorisk studie* (Rev. uppl. ed., Vitterhetsakademiens skriftserie om Europa). Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> See Bodin (2016), p. 28; see also Jangfeldt (2017), p. 12. Partly in order to wash my hands from the sin of Russophobia, I want to point to a point made by Swiss journalist Guy Mettan, who states that, in contrast to the widespread Western conception of it being the Orthodox Church that caused the schism, it actually was the West that can be viewed to have initiated it. For this argument, cf. Mettan, G. (2017). *Varför vi älskar att hata Ryssland: Russofobi från Karl den Store till Barack Obama*. Translation S. Lindgren. Stockholm: Karneval förlag, p. 111.

<sup>38</sup> See e.g., Jangfeldt (2017), pp. 62-67; Riasanovsky, N., & Steinberg, M. (2019). *A history of Russia* (Ninth ed.). New York: Oxford University Press, p. 287; Zygar' & Hodson (2016), p. 279.

and political power. And what is more, Orthodoxy makes for the correct interpretation of Christianity.<sup>39</sup> Moving on, the second principle, *samoderžavie*, implies the belief that “Russia’s greatness” always has “depended on the strength of its rulers to unify the country.”<sup>40</sup> Here, the tsar, like a family father, only has the best interests of his people in mind.<sup>41</sup> Finally and most fascinatingly, the principle of *narodnost’* refers to the uniqueness of the Russian nation, a nation that distinguishes itself from other nations due to the special bond between the people and the tsar. Thus, it allows being examined as the “reverse side of autocracy: a view of Russians as uniquely loving and obedient subjects but also in need of a strong hand.”<sup>42</sup>

But it is not until we apply the above historical dichotomies to the discursive realities of today’s Russian nation-building project that it gets truly interesting. More precisely, I wish to point to a contemporary interpretation of, I dare here assert, *the* Uvarovian principle of Russian statehood, *narodnost’*. Adding to the pertinence of the interpretation in question is that it again is authored by the ‘Kremlin’s grey cardinal’, Vladislav Surkov. In a February 2019 article, titled *Dolgoe gosudarstvo Putina (Putin’s long state)*,<sup>43</sup> Surkov begins his reflections by denouncing the Western way of life and all Western-style democracies in general. Thereby, he can be viewed acting in accordance to the old Russia-West dichotomy, applying the practice of othering in order to construct a Russian national identity. Moving on, he delivers an updated version of *narodnost’*, linking it to a specific Russian type of “deep people” (*glubinnyj narod*), a concept, apparently, of his own design:

Глубинного государства в России нет, оно все на виду, зато есть глубинный народ. ... Своей гигантской супермассой глубокий народ создает непреодолимую силу культурной гравитации, которая соединяет нацию и притягивает (придавливает) к земле (к родной земле) элиту. ... *Народность*, что бы это ни значило, предшествует государственности, предопределяет ее форму, ограничивает фантазии теоретиков, принуждает практиков к определенным поступкам. ... Умение слышать и понимать народ, видеть его насквозь, на всю глубину и действовать сообразно – уникальное и главное достоинство государства Путина.<sup>44</sup>

There’s no deep state in Russia, everything’s out in the open, but there is a deep people. ... With its gigantic supermass the deep people creates an irresistible force of cultural gravitation, which unites the nation and pulls (presses) the elite down to earth (native earth). ... *Narodnost’*, however defined, precedes

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<sup>39</sup> Jangfeldt (2017), p. 63. The translation from the Swedish original is mine (TT).

<sup>40</sup> Riasanovsky & Steinberg (2019), p. 287.

<sup>41</sup> See Jangfeldt (2017), p. 63; see also Riasanovsky & Steinberg (2019), p. 287

<sup>42</sup> Riasanovsky & Steinberg 2019, p. 287; cf. Jangfeldt (2017), pp. 64-65.

<sup>43</sup> The full title reads *Dolgoe gosudarstvo Putina: O tom, čto zdjes’ voobščee proischodit*. A literal translation of the title could be something along the lines of *The Long State of Putin: About what’s generally happening here* or alternatively: *Putin’s Long-lasting state: [...]*. The subtitle, however, proves trickier. The term *voobščee* (*вообще*) could, given the article’s slightly sarcastic undertone, mean anything from *in general to actually, in the first place, in fact*, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Surkov, V. (2019, February 11). *Dolgoe gosudarstvo Putina: O tom, čto zdjes’ voobščee proischodit*. *Nezavisimaja Gazeta*. Retrieved 26. Apr. 2019 from [http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5\\_7503\\_surkov.html](http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5_7503_surkov.html).

statehood, predetermines its form, limits the fantasies of theoreticians, and forces practitioners to take certain steps. ... An ability to hear and understand the people, to see through it to its depths, and to act accordingly, is the unique and primary quality of Putin's state.<sup>45</sup>

By propagating the special bond between the Russian 'deep' people and the state, headed by Putin, Surkov can be viewed following the historical path set by Uvarov and Nikolaj I.

### 2.2.3. Russia between past, present and future

In reference to Surkov picking up the centuries-old tenet of 'narodnost', I propose to further draw from studies regarding Russian history. Attempting to describe the nature of development and, moreover, the course of Russian history itself, Reddaway & Glinski (2001), for example, turn to a "popular and easily recognizable metaphor," and suggest viewing it "as a pendulum swinging back and forth—between progress and conservative backlash."<sup>46</sup> As to why Russian history seems to develop in this peculiar manner, Reddaway & Glinski put forward a most illuminating insight: To regard the development of humankind as a strictly linear progress, i.e. in accordance with the "doctrine of universal and irreversible historical progress"<sup>47</sup>, constitutes a primarily Western take on history. "By contrast, an increasing number of Russian historians and social scientists have embraced variations of the cyclical paradigm of change."<sup>48</sup> What is more, this alternative view of the world can again be linked to the ideas of the Orthodox Church. Whereas the Western Christian model propagates a strictly linear perception of time, its Orthodox pendant is even known to express time as a cyclic phenomenon.<sup>49</sup> Of what this could mean for a specific 'Russian' worldview, the two of them conclude cogently:

While few serious scholars would interpret the historical cycles as mere repetition without development, establishing parallels between distant periods of Russian history has long been an ingrained mode of thinking characteristic of Russians' view of their past, present, and even future.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The English translation of the relevant passages is, apart from a few changes, retrieved from the blog of Russia specialist Paul Robinson. Cf. Robinson (2019, February 11). The italics in the original have been added (TT). In general, what the translation of the Russian primary sources is concerned, the author of this study has applied a free style with the aim to make the translations into English as readable as possible. Wherever possible, official translations have been used.

<sup>46</sup> Reddaway, P., & Glinski, D. (2001). *The tragedy of Russia's reforms: Market bolshevism against democracy*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, pp. 18-19.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> See Bodin (2016), pp. 16-17.

<sup>50</sup> Reddaway & Glinski (2001), p. 18.

Thus, the reinstatement of Uvarov's principles as pillars of Putin's 'long state' can be viewed as an example of this specific Russian thinking, in that the new state-ideology, at least the one Surkov endorses, has been shaped by memories of the past.<sup>51</sup>

#### 2.2.4. The chaotic 90s and the vanguard mentality of the elite

The inclusion of the 1990s experience to the contextualisation of the study is motivated by the circumstance that after Putin assumed the office of president at the turn of the millennium, the new regime sought to define itself against precisely this era. Pomerantsev (2014a), for example, remarks the following in regard to state-TV broadcasts in the beginning of the 2010s: "They repeat the great mantras of the era: the President is the President of 'stability,' the antithesis to the era of 'confusion and twilight' in the 1990s."<sup>52</sup> Ostrovsky (2017), further, observes that the "narrative of avenging the humiliation of the 1990s, 'imposed on Russia by the West,' would become the centrepiece of the restoration ideology of Vladimir Putin."<sup>53</sup> Against these remarks, let us now examine the turmoil of the 1990s and expand, among other things, on the part the West allegedly played in it.

The starting shot to the reforms under Boris El'cin was fired in 1992 in form of a radical economic program, labelled 'shock therapy', which was "intended to 'cure' the Russian economy of its attachments to central state planning and Russian citizens of their passivity as economic individuals."<sup>54</sup> Further, these reforms enjoyed the endorsement of, among others, the United States and the International Monetary Fond (IMF).<sup>55</sup> As a consequence of this shock therapy, millions of Russians saw their savings lost, their pensions devalued, and the gross domestic product dived by brutal 43%.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, wealth accumulated in the hands of a ruthless few, the oligarchs, i.e. influential super-rich that not only controlled significant parts of the country's economy but, further, owned the biggest media outlets and fostered close ties to the political elite.<sup>57</sup> Bringing the country

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<sup>51</sup> In regard to the question and issue of reforms in Russia, Reddaway & Glinski (2001) even refer to a specific "reformers' 'path-dependence', in as every new round of reforms was shaped by memory of the past and comparisons with similar previous experience." In: *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Pomerantsev, P. (2014a). *Nothing is true and everything is possible: The surreal heart of the new Russia*(First ed.). New York: PublicAffairs, p. 65; see also Ostrovsky (2017), p. 268.

<sup>53</sup> Ostrovsky (2017), p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> Riasanovsky & Steinberg (2019), p. 591.

<sup>55</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 593.

<sup>56</sup> See Riasanovsky & Steinberg (2019), p. 593.

<sup>57</sup> See White, S. (2011). *Understanding Russian politics* (Rev. ed.). Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, pp. 170-72.

to the brink of disintegration, I completely align with documentary filmmaker Löfgren (2016) in that the chaotic 90s paved the path for a strongman like Putin.<sup>58</sup>

What I, most of all, am trying to put forward by these observations, is that the 90s-reformers can be ascribed a specific type of mentality, a mentality that Glinski & Reddaway (1999) refer to as “market bolshevism.” Here, they define bolshevism as “the self-confident, almost messianic vanguard mentality of a self-anointed elite that feels entitled to impose its own understanding of progress and development on the ‘backward’ majority.”<sup>59</sup> This mentality can even be considered to shine through some of the earlier data examined in this paper, such as the imposing of the three pillars of statehood on the population under Nikolaj I and, most recently, Surkov’s imaginations regarding the love that Russia’s “deep people” feel towards their president. Sensing the potential in this phenomenon, I suggest adding it to our list of characteristics constituting the inter-discourse communication between Russian elites and the people.

As to the West’s role in the debacle of the 90s, I want to point to some of the empirical evidence in Löfgren’s documentary. He interviews a number of key Western specialists who, in the capacity of advisors to the Russian government, experienced the Western-backed reforms in young post-Soviet Russia up close. United in the hope that the West would not miss the historic opportunity of integrating Russia into the global society,<sup>60</sup> well-known scholars like Jeffrey Sachs<sup>61</sup> and Graham Allison<sup>62</sup> eventually saw their dreams dissipate. According to Sachs, for example, the United States, as to the early 90s, remained stuck to patterns of thought from the Cold War era and instead of seizing the opportunity to create a lasting peace, took the chance to ‘crush its former archenemy.’<sup>63</sup> Thus, the ‘myth’ of the West aiming to “encroach on and emasculate Russia”<sup>64</sup> – a trope that one can observe circulating in Russian media today – can be viewed to increase in validity, for what the 90s are concerned at least.

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<sup>58</sup> See Löfgren, P. (2016). *Att skapa en Putin* (Documentary) Retrieved 26. Apr. 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at9aQ83NDJ0>, ca. 53:55 – 54:00.

<sup>59</sup> Glinski, D. & Reddaway, P. (1999). What Went Wrong in Russia? The Ravages of “Market Bolshevism”. *Journal of Democracy* 10(2), pp. 19-34. Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved 24. Apr. 2019 from Project MUSE database, p. 24; see also Riasanovsky & Steinberg (2019), p. 593.

<sup>60</sup> See Löfgren (2016), 08:00 – 08:45.

<sup>61</sup> Jeffrey Sachs is a renowned American professor of economics at Columbia University.

<sup>62</sup> Graham Allison is a renowned American professor of political science at Harvard University.

<sup>63</sup> See Löfgren (2016), 22:45 – 23:00. The passage about the United States aiming to crush its former archenemy is Löfgren’s paraphrase on Sachs’ words. In Sachs’ own words: “Washington could not hear it, it’s pathetic. Russia, that was gonna be the other side. They saw the end of the Cold War as a chance to push American power, to push American influence, to push Russia out of the Middle East, to do all sorts of things. ... They were thinking about the unipolar world, spreading America’s dominance. ... So they were not interested in Russia’s early recovery.” In Löfgren (2016), 23:00 – 23:45. The transcription of the passage is mine (TT). See also Zygar’ & Hodson (2016), pp. 17-18.

<sup>64</sup> Ostrovsky (2017), p. 313.

Moving on, the following chapter is reserved for the examination of the (re-)imagination of the Russian nation under Vladimir Putin.

### 2.3. The Imaginarium of Dr Putin

#### 2.3.1. Gosudarstvenničestvo – the primacy of the state

Whilst subscribing to the notion that Russia's current cultural and political landscape is the result of multiple developments, one nevertheless can point to a premeditated plan of sorts – carrying the signature of Putin.<sup>65</sup> On December 30, 1999, two days before Putin was handed the presidency by El'cin, he published a political manifesto,<sup>66</sup> which in the words of Ostrovsky, “hailed the state as the key driver of success and a force of consolidation.”<sup>67</sup> Apart from emphasizing the importance of a strong Russian state, Putin's manifesto can even be viewed to include references to the old East-West dichotomy of the Russian idea. The words of the young statist, further, highlight Russia's singularity:

Государственничество. Россия не скоро станет, если вообще станет, вторым изданием, скажем, США или Англии, где либеральные ценности имеют глубокие исторические традиции. У нас государство, его институты и структуры всегда играли исключительно важную роль в жизни страны, народа. Крепкое государство для россиянина не аномалия, не нечто такое, с чем следует бороться, а, напротив, источник и гарант порядка, инициатор и главная движущая сила любых перемен.<sup>68</sup>

Gosudarstvenničestvo. Russia will not soon become, if ever, a second edition of, say, the United States or England, where liberal values have deep historical traditions. For us the state with its institutions and structures has always played a crucial role in the life of the country and its people. For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly to fight. Quite the contrary, it is the source and guarantor of any change.<sup>69</sup>

Although one cannot refer to a practice of negative othering from Putin, he clearly refrains from assigning Russia the same fate as the United States and England, or at least what the imminent future was concerned as of 1999/2000, thus imagining Russia as a nation apart from, although not necessarily against, the West. Moreover, I suggest examining ‘gosudarstvenničestvo’ as a modernized version of the Uvarovian two-sided coin of ‘samoderžavie’/’narodnost’’, with the

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Ostrovsky (2017), pp. 264-265.

<sup>66</sup> Putin, V. (1999, December 30). *Rossija na rubeže tysjačeljetij*. *Nezamisimaja Gazeta*. Retrieved 6. Apr. 2019 from [http://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4\\_millennium.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/1999-12-30/4_millennium.html). English title: *Russia on the Threshold of the New Millennium*.

<sup>67</sup> Ostrovsky (2017), p. 264.

<sup>68</sup> Putin (December 30, 1999).

<sup>69</sup> The translation is mine, except for the part starting with “For Russians,” which is the work of Ostrovsky (2017), p. 264.

‘gosudar’ (‘sovereign’ or ‘monarch’) – here: president Putin – at the helm of the Russian state (‘rossijskoe gosudarstvo’).

What the essence of ‘gosudarstvenničestvo’ is concerned, Ostrovsky suggests going even further. “Russia did not need state ideology,” he argues. “Its ideology, its national idea, was the state.”<sup>70</sup> At this point, I intend to further latch onto research conducted in studies of Russian strategic culture and, more specifically, to reflections pertaining to a possible Kremlin *grand strategy*. Skak (2019), for example, explicitly suggests this grand strategy to be that of “regime security.”<sup>71</sup> What is more, the achievement of this goal allows for the deployment of every resource possible; regime survival by all means necessary.<sup>72</sup> Thus, this study suggests viewing the Russian nation-building project and, further, the inter-discourse communication between state and people, against the background of the grand strategy of regime security.

### 2.3.2. Press-state relations and the fall of the free media

Connecting to Habermas’ concept of mediasphere being a place where language becomes a medium of domination and social force, it did not take long until the Russian state under Putin would commence its crackdown on the free and independent media.<sup>73</sup> Summing up the developments within the Russian mediasphere, Pomerantsev (2014b) aptly states the following: “The Kremlin’s idea is to own all forms of political discourse, to not let any independent movements develop outside of its walls.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ostrovsky (2017), p. 264.

<sup>71</sup> Skak, M. (2019). Russian strategic culture. The generational approach to the Russian generational state thesis. In: R. Kanet (ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*. New York: Routledge, p. 115.

<sup>72</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, this short overview does no honour to the complex developments that have occurred in the Russian mediasphere since Vladimir Putin’s first presidency. For a more detailed account, see e.g., Bærug, R. (2018). *Putins presse: Om russisk media og propaganda*. Larvik]: Liv forl.; Gill, A., & Bass, K. (2016). *Discourse in danger attacks on free expression in Putin’s Russia*. New York: PEN American Center; Ostrovsky (2017); Vartanova, E. (2011). The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics. In D. Hallin & P. Mancini (eds.), *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* (Communication, Society and Politics, pp. 119-142). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>74</sup> Pomerantsev, P. (2014b, November 7). The hidden author of Putinism: How Vladislav Surkov invented the new Russia. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved 18. Apr. 2019 from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/hidden-author-putinism-russia-vladislav-surkov/382489/>; See also Pasitselska (2017), p. 595; Edenborg, E. (2017). *Politics of visibility and belonging: From Russia’s “homosexual propaganda” laws to the Ukraine war* (Interventions). New York, NY: Routledge, p. 2-3.

Against these reflections, one can further observe that the overwhelming majority of Russian TV channels today are owned either directly by the state – as is the case with *Rossija-1* that broadcasts Kiselëv’s show – or by companies closely affiliated with the state and/or president Putin.<sup>75</sup> Although independent media outlets do exist, they seem only to be tolerated by the authorities, as Bærug (2018) remarks in a sobering fashion, ‘for as long they do not pose a threat to the Kremlin and stay marginal.’<sup>76</sup> And what the independent Russian TV-channels are concerned, ‘marginal’ truly makes for a fitting description: According to a March 2018 survey, only 2% indicated watching the TV-channel *Dožd’* (*TV Rain*) on a regular basis, whereas 6% stated the same regarding *RBK TV*.<sup>77</sup> Both of these channels, however, have got to feel the Kremlin’s scorn. In 2014, *Dožd’* was removed from the cable network after it had conducted an online survey questioning Soviet leadership during World War II. To be more precise, on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the siege of Leningrad, *Dožd’* suggested viewers to debate whether ‘Leningrad should have been surrendered in order to save hundreds of thousands of lives.’<sup>78</sup> In response, *Dožd’* got targeted by a propaganda campaign, led by major federal TV-channels. In the words of then-editor in chief Michajl Zygar’:

Когда большинство федеральных каналов сделали сюжеты о том, что в телеканале Дождь работают фашисты, которые поддерживают Гитлера... И под этим предлогом, большая часть кабельных операторов и спутниковых операторов нас отключила.<sup>79</sup>

Most federal channels said that there were fascists working here at TV Rain, who support Hitler. Based on that, many cable and satellite operators took us off the air.<sup>80</sup>

The practice of othering undesirables as ‘fascists’ and, further, the act of establishing a connection between them and the Nazi-invasion of the Motherland (*rodina*) constitute some of the more alarming trends. What regards *RBK TV*, it can be viewed to have lost some of its independence when, in 2016, its editorial management was replaced after reporting on Putin’s inner circle, i.e. representatives of the Russian elite, in line with the so-called ‘Panama Papers.’<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See e.g., Pasitselska (2017), p. 595; Zygar’ & Hodson (2016), p. 238.

<sup>76</sup> See Bærug (2018), pp. 23-24.

<sup>77</sup> See Levada-Centr (2018, April).

<sup>78</sup> Gessen, M. (2014, January 30). Russia's only independent TV channel has felt the full force of censorship. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 5. May 2019 from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/30/russia-independent-tv-channel-censorship-tv-rain-leningrad>; see also EUvsDisinfo. (2016, October 21). *Crackdowns on Russian media: The story continues*. Retrieved 3. May 2019 from <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/crackdowns-on-russian-media-the-story-continues/>; Kafanov, L. (2015). *Silencing dissent in Russia: Putin’s propaganda machine* (Documentary). VICE News. Retrieved 10. May 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-AmXt8u9LE>, 15:50 – 16:45.

<sup>79</sup> Kafanov (2015), 16:15 – 16:30.

<sup>80</sup> Here, I used the English subtitles provided by the VICE News documentary, cf. Kafanov (2015).

<sup>81</sup> See e.g., Bærug (2018), p. 24; EUvsDisinfo (2016, October 21); Sakwa (2019), p. 216. As to what the ‘Panama Papers’ are, cf. International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (2019). *The Panama Papers: About the investigation*. Retrieved 4. May 2019 from <https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/pages/panama-papers-about-the-investigation/>.

In line with these considerations, I wish to point to a recent investigative article by the independent online outlet *Proekt*, which, in my estimation, has contributed significantly to the study of press-state relations in Russia.<sup>82</sup> Titled *Povelitel' kukol* (2019),<sup>83</sup> the report speaks of a state control so total that it had not been until the publication of said article that Aleksej Gromov, First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of Russia since 2012, with a 'responsibility for the media sphere'<sup>84</sup>, was identified as the 'head of Russian state-propaganda'. Drawing from eyewitness testimonies, *Proekt* reports how Gromov, allegedly, every Thursday meets up with, among others, executives of all the major TV-channels.<sup>85</sup> At these weekly meetings,

Громов обсуждает с собравшимися график президента и может дать прямое поручение — как освещать событие и что именно нужно показать или сказать в репортажах, следует из слов участников мероприятия. «А на это можно не обращать внимания», — такой фразой, по словам одного участника, в Кремле могут наложить вето на ту или иную новость.<sup>86</sup>

Gromov discusses the schedule of the president with the audience and can give direct instructions on how to cover an event and what needs to be shown or said in reports, as follows from the words of the participants of these meetings. "And this can be ignored" – marks the expression that, according to a participant, the Kremlin can use to put a veto on this or that news story.<sup>87</sup>

What *Proekt's* investigation suggests, is that censorship and propaganda constitute parts of Russia's current information space and, with reference to our research questions, allow being identified as further hallmarks of the communication between state-elites and the Russian people.

### 2.3.3. The besieged fortress

Moving on, it is time to narrow down on the ideological construct of the besieged fortress. To begin with, I want to draw from Bodin's reflections on Russian cultural and political history, according to which the 'conviction of being surrounded by enemies constitutes the probably most important doctrine in Russian security politics, starting from the 1200s until the dissolution of the Soviet

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<sup>82</sup> Rubin, M., Žolobova, M., & Badanin, R. (2019, January 23). *Povelitel' kukol: Portret Alekseja Gromova, rukovoditel'ja rossijskoj gosudarstvennoj propagandy*. *Proekt*. Retrieved 2. May from <https://www.proekt.media/portrait/alexey-gromov/>

<sup>83</sup> "Lord of the Dolls: Portrait of Alexey Gromov, the head of Russian state propaganda" – translation retrieved from an article by the *EU vs Disinformation* campaign, which is run by the European External Action Service East Stratcom Task Force. See EUvsDisinfo. (2019, February 4). *The weekly meetings*. Retrieved 02. May 2019 from <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/the-weekly-meetings/>

<sup>84</sup> See Rubin, Žolobova & Badanin (2019, January 23).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Rubin, Žolobova & Badanin (2019, January 23); see also EUvsDisinfo. (2019, February 4).

<sup>86</sup> Rubin, Žolobova & Badanin (2019, January 23); see also EUvsDisinfo. (2019, February 4).

<sup>87</sup> Mostly own translation but with reference to translations made by EUvsDisinfo. Cf. EUvsDisinfo. (2019, February 4).

Union.’<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the perceived feeling of being surrounded by enemies seems still to be prevalent in contemporary Russia, at least according to a December 2017 survey by the Levada-Center on ‘Russia’s enemies’.<sup>89</sup> Most tellingly, the respondents, were presented with the following answer alternative – ‘our country is surrounded by enemies on all sides.’<sup>90</sup> This option was picked by 23%. Further 27% indicated that ‘any country on the path to revitalization will have enemies’.<sup>91</sup> In regard to our study, these figures suggest that at least half of the population (50%) presuppose the existence of external enemies. Against this data, the following words by Ostrovsky appear both relevant and topical: “One of Russia’s oldest ideological constructions – ‘the besieged fortress’ – was also its most durable.”<sup>92</sup>

Against these backgrounds, it is time to expand on the important issue of anti-Americanism in Russia. The widespread anti-American and, for that matter, anti-Western sentiment in Russia has some of its foundations in, firstly, the deep-rooted image of the United States as the enemy of the Soviet Union during the Cold War and, secondly, in the more recent deterioration of US-Russian relations. This more recent deterioration can be viewed to have begun as early as during the chaotic 90s<sup>93</sup> but, especially, with the Ukraine crisis of 2014.<sup>94</sup> Even though the list of US-American and Western actions undermining and containing Russia is long<sup>95</sup> – with the debate around the eastern expansion of NATO and the long history of sanctions making for prominent issues<sup>96</sup> – I here only have time to point to a few more important aspects.

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<sup>88</sup> Bodin (2016), p. 56. The translation from the Swedish original is mine (TT). Similar thoughts are even voiced by Martti Kari, retired colonel of the Finnish Defence Forces turned university lecturer, cf. Kari, M. (2018, October 10). *Russian thinking* [Video]. Cyber Security Nordic. Helsinki, 19:45 – 21:45. Viz., Taavila (2017).

<sup>89</sup> Levada-centr (2018, January). *Rossijane nazvali glavnyh vragov strany*. Retrieved 4. May 2019 from <https://www.levada.ru/2018/01/10/rossiyane-nazvali-glavnyh-vragov-strany/>.

<sup>90</sup> The original says: «Наша страна окружена врагами со всех сторон.» In Levada-centr (2018, January). What the different answer alternatives are concerned, the respondents were asked to single out one statement that they agreed most with.

<sup>91</sup> The other answer alternatives, translated into English, read as follows: ‘Our most dangerous enemies are those who are hidden within the country’ (21%) and ‘There is no need to seek out enemies – the cause of our misfortune is our own mistakes’ (16%). Lastly, 13% found it difficult to say how they thought about Russia’s enemies. Cf. Levada-centr (2018, January).

<sup>92</sup> Ostrovsky (2017), p. 307.

<sup>93</sup> See e.g., Zygar’ & Hodson (2016), p. 17-18; see also subchapter 2.2.3.

<sup>94</sup> See Krastev, I. & Leonard, M. (2014). “The new world disorder.” In: European Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR117\\_TheNewEuropeanDisorder\\_ESSAY.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR117_TheNewEuropeanDisorder_ESSAY.pdf). See also Trenin (2016), p. 1; Lipman & Petrov (2015), p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> For longer, yet not exhaustive listings, see e.g., Zygar’ & Hodson (2016), p. 109; Gates, R. (2014). *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at war*. New York: Alfred Knopf, p. 157; Trenin (2016), p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> See Zygar’ & Hodson (2016), p. 109.

In preparation for the forces that would get unleashed around Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014,<sup>97</sup> I, shortly, want to take up the important ideological groundwork done by Vladislav Surkov.<sup>98</sup> Triggered by Putin's defeat in line with the so-called Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004-05), Surkov was tasked with the crafting of an anti-revolutionary doctrine for Russia.<sup>99</sup> The Orange Revolution, also referred to as Putin's "main phobia",<sup>100</sup> had ended with the defeat of Kremlin-backed presidential candidate Viktor Janukovič in favour of the Western-backed Viktor Juščenko.<sup>101</sup> For Putin, the colour-revolution came to mean primarily one thing: The United States meddled in the Ukrainian elections and pushed their candidate to become president, all of which happened against the best efforts of Russia who, on top of that, had centuries-old ties to Ukraine. And, importantly, the United States would attempt to accomplish the same in Russia.<sup>102</sup> Connecting to the grand-strategy of regime security, such a development had to be fought tooth and nail. And Surkov delivered in form of the ideological doctrine of 'suverenajna demokratija' (sovereign democracy), a political system based, essentially, on othering, and the claim of Russia's uniqueness. As phrased nicely by Zygar' (2016),

Концепция Суркова заключалась в том, что простой внутренней наладкой проблемы не решишь, потому что проблемы у России не только внутренние (а возможно, совсем не внутренние), но и внешние. России мешает внешний враг, который покушается на ее суверенитет. Поэтому российская демократия должна быть особой — она должна быть готова к собственной обороне от внешней угрозы.<sup>103</sup>

Surkov's concept was that the problem would not be solved through simple internal adjustment, since Russia's problems were not only internal, and possibly not internal at all. Rather, Russia was hampered by an external enemy forever encroaching on its sovereignty. Therefore, Russian democracy had to be unique, and ready to defend itself against external threats.<sup>104</sup>

Thus, the narrative of the besieged fortress was again infused to the story of the Russian nation and, moreover, to the Russian political system.

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<sup>97</sup> What the 'annexation' of Crimea in 2014 is concerned, Russia and the Western countries find themselves at odds. Whereas the West considers the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian national body as an unlawful action of annexation by Russia, the Russian Federation maintains that the Crimean population conducted a lawful referendum and, as a result, chose to join Russia, where it now features as the federal subject 'Respublika Krym' (Republic of Crimea).

<sup>98</sup> Surkov functioned then as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration (1999-2008).

<sup>99</sup> See Zygar' & Hodson (2016), p. 100.

<sup>100</sup> See e.g., Zygar' & Hodson (2016), p. 66; see also Pynnöniemi, K. (2019). Information-psychological warfare in Russian security strategy. In: R. Kanet (ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*. New York: Routledge, p. 217-18.

<sup>101</sup> See Zygar' & Hodson (2016), pp. 91-95.

<sup>102</sup> See e.g., Zygar' & Hodson, p. 95; The Economist (2018, March 17). *Putin's games with the west* [Documentary], 2:25 – 2:35.

<sup>103</sup> See Zygar' (2016), iBooks.

<sup>104</sup> Zygar' & Hodson (2016), p. 102.

The years between the Orange Revolution and the onset of the Ukraine crisis bared witness to yet another constitutive set of events – Russian citizens taking to the streets and protesting against the federal government during the so-called ‘Bolotnaja’ protests (2011-12), that would change the Russian socio-political landscape dramatically.<sup>105</sup> The effect the opposition rallies had on the newly re-elected president Putin, was that he stopped looking for common ground with the predominantly young and urban ‘intelligencija’ – prompting conservative backlash and a turn towards ‘traditional Russian values.’<sup>106</sup> In other words, the pendulum of Russian history swung right. Aiming to consolidate the country and building on Surkov’s ideological work, “Putin turned to anti-Americanism as the only ideological tenet that had survived the collapse of the Soviet Union.”<sup>107</sup> Painting the image of the protests as having partly been organized by the West, Putin at the same time started claiming Russia’s *moral* superiority over the Western Other.<sup>108</sup> In a September 2013 speech at the Valdai Club, Putin mused the following regarding a Russian national identity:

Ещё один серьёзный вызов российской идентичности связан с событиями, которые происходят в мире. Здесь есть и внешнеполитические, и моральные аспекты. Мы видим, как многие евроатлантические страны фактически пошли по пути отказа от своих корней, в том числе и от христианских ценностей, составляющих основу западной цивилизации. Отрицаются нравственные начала и любая традиционная идентичность: национальная, культурная, религиозная или даже половая. Проводится политика, ставящая на один уровень многодетную семью и однополое партнёрство, веру в бога или веру в сатану.<sup>109</sup>

Another serious challenge to Russia’s identity is linked to events taking place in the world. Here there are both foreign policy and moral aspects. We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan.<sup>110</sup>

Thus, the centuries old image of the West as morally decadent and rotten was fused into the new official rhetoric with one important additive: homosexuality.<sup>111</sup> Putin’s traditional turn, further, cemented another development – the redux of Orthodox ideas into the Russian nation-building project.<sup>112</sup> Further, just before defining the Russia against the ‘Euro-Atlantic Other’, Putin,

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<sup>105</sup> Protesting, first, the rigged parliamentary elections of 2011 and, second, Putin’s upcoming return to presidency in May 2012. Putin served as Russia’s prime minister from 2008 to 2012. The president during that period was Dmitrij Medvedjev. Cf. Zygar’ & Hodson (2016), pp. 210-26.

<sup>106</sup> See Zygar’ & Hodson (2016), pp. 210-26; see also Ostrovsky (2017), pp. 310-12.

<sup>107</sup> Ostrovsky (2017), p. 312; cf. Jangfeldt (2017), p. 182.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Ostrovsky (2017), p. 312.

<sup>109</sup> Prezident Rossii (2013, September 19). *Zasedanie meždunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba «Valdaj»* [Transcript]. Retrieved 5. May 2019 from <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>.

<sup>110</sup> President of Russia (2013, September 19). *Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club* [Transcript]. Retrieved 5. May 2019 from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>; see also Ostrovsky (2017), p. 312-13.

<sup>111</sup> See Snyder (2018), pp. 51-52. For the image of Western Europe as ‘old’ and ‘rotten’, cf. Jangfeldt (2017), p. 71.

<sup>112</sup> See The Economist (2018, July 17). *Putin’s Russia and the ghosts of the Romanov’s* [Documentary]. Retrieved 8. May 2019 from <http://y2u.be/7IWWAIS-tE4>.

interestingly, voiced the following interpretation on the relationship between past, present and future:

Мы должны гордиться своей историей, и нам есть чем гордиться. Вся наша история без изъятий должна стать частью российской идентичности. Без признания этого невозможно взаимное доверие и движение общества вперёд.<sup>113</sup>

We must be proud of our history, and we have things to be proud of. Our entire, uncensored history must be a part of Russian identity. Without recognising this it is impossible to establish mutual trust and allow society to move forward.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, one could argue, Putin advocates viewing time in specific Russian terms, incorporating not only a few but *all* Russian pasts into the construct of a common national identity. Connecting to our introductory reflections, Putin thus presented to the world a prime example of a most malleable of ideologies. Further, I suggest the propagation of this specific view on the country's history to make for another central hallmark of the inter-discourse communication between state and population.

The change in discourse had consequences. As noted by historians Riasanovsky & Steinberg: "Nationalism became mainstream: in official rhetoric, in new laws, in popular culture, and in public opinion."<sup>115</sup> What public opinion is concerned, one can note an especially dramatic increase in anti-Western sentiment between the years of 2013 and 2014.<sup>116</sup> Further, the anti-American turn was cemented into Russian law. In form of an asymmetric reaction to the so-called Magnitsky Act (2012)<sup>117</sup>, the Kremlin's new chief strategist, Vjačeslav Volodin, tailored a new law, which later would get signed into law by president Putin: From now on, US-American citizen were not allowed to adopt Russian children.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Prezident Rossii (2013, September 19).

<sup>114</sup> President of Russia (2013, September 19).

<sup>115</sup> Riasanovsky & Steinberg (2019), p. 642.

<sup>116</sup> Being asked to name countries that one perceived as 'unfriendly and hostile with respect to Russia', anti-American sentiments, for example, surged from 38 % in 2013 to 69 % in 2014. Not taking into account countries of the so-called 'near abroad' (bližneje zarubežje), the perception of other Western countries like the United Kingdom (from 9 till 18 %) and Germany (from 3 till 18 %) also witnessed significant surges. Cf. Levada-centr (2018, June). "Druz'ja" i "vragi" Rossii. Retrieved 5. May 2019 from <https://www.levada.ru/2018/06/14/druzya-i-vragi-rossii-3/>; see also Lipman (2015), p. 121; Gudkov, L. (2018). Structure and functions of Russian Anti-Americanism: Mobilization phase, 2012–2015, *Russian Social Science Review*, 59:4, pp. 332–382.

<sup>117</sup> I.e., targeted sanctions on selected Russian government officials who, according to the United States Congress, were guilty of human rights violations in connection to the death of Russian lawyer Sergej Magnitskij in a Moscow prison in 2009. See GovTrack.us. (2019). H.R. 6156 — 112th Congress: *Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal and Sergej Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012*. Retrieved from <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/hr6156>; see also Zygar' & Hodson (2016), p. 240; Pomerantsev (2014a), pp. 220–21.

<sup>118</sup> See Zygar' & Hodson (2016), pp. 240–45; see also Jangfeldt (2017), p. 182.

#### 2.3.4. Political technology and the politics of eternity

Moving on, I wish to expand on the (Russian) notion of shaping one's present worldview with reference to past events. Circling back to the controversy surrounding the censorship of TV-channel *Dožd'*, I want to point to a observation made by Gessen (2014): "Contemporary Russia's concept of its place in history is centred squarely on its victory in the Second World War, and the siege of Leningrad forms the heroic heart of that narrative."<sup>119</sup> The potential this narrative yields for the discourse of the contemporary nation-building project can, in my estimation, not be understated. According to Snyder (2018), for example, the Soviet experience of World War II would come to form the epicentre of what he calls *the politics of eternity*. What this notion captures is "another experience of time" where one nation is placed "at the center of a cyclical story of victimhood."<sup>120</sup> Connecting to the earlier reflections on a cyclical paradigm of time, Snyder means that the first steps towards a politics of eternity were taken already under Leonid Brežnev (1964-82), where the Communist Party started imagining "the Second World War as the apogee of Soviet history. Soviet citizens were instructed to look not forwards but backward, to the triumph of their parents or grandparents in the Second World War."<sup>121</sup> The story connects to the image of the West as a constant threat to Russia not only due to the former ideological impasse but, also, "because the Soviet Union had been invaded from the West in 1941." Further: "Soviet citizens born in the 1960s and 1970s were raised in a cult of the past that defined the West as a perpetual threat."<sup>122</sup> As to more recent developments, Snyder links the recurrence of a politics of eternity to the Bolotnaja protests:

After the fakery of 2011 and 2012, the domestic political emergency was permanent, and so the enemy had to be as well. Some intractable foreign foe had to be linked to the protestors, so that they, rather than Putin himself, could be portrayed as the danger to Russian statehood. Protestor's actions had to be uncoupled from the very real domestic problem that Putin had created, and associated instead with a fake foreign threat to Russian sovereignty. The politics of eternity requires and produces problems that are insoluble because they are fictional. For Russia in 2012, the fictional problem became the designs of the European Union and the United States to destroy Russia.<sup>123</sup>

And further:

The politics of eternity requires points in the past to which the present can cycle, demonstrating the innocence of the country, the right to rule of its leader, and the pointlessness of thinking about the future.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Gessen, M. (2014, January 30).

<sup>120</sup> Snyder (2018), pp. 7-8.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

These points constitute of the Great Patriotic War and the alleged cyclical and never-ending threat of Western aggression – perfect premises for the narrative of a besieged fortress.

Moving on, Snyder's considerations point to another central issue - the fabrication of fictional problems. What this practice suggests, is the practice of a so-called *virtual politics* (Wilson, 2005)<sup>125</sup> in action. Appropriating Pynnöniemi & Rácz's interpretation of Wilson's definition, "the key to what Wilson labelled *virtual politics* is that authority is invented: political technologists stage the basic mythology of the state."<sup>126</sup> What the "dark arts"<sup>127</sup> of *political technology* require and reflect, as Wilson (2011) marks, is a "deep-rooted corruption of political culture." And what it denotes, is a "highly developed industry of political manipulation",<sup>128</sup> of which the institutionalised propaganda and censorship described in line with *Proekt's* investigative work constitute prime examples of.

In connection to the notion of virtual politics, I think the time to expand on the introductory approximations to the term of propaganda is drawing closer. First, however, I want to point to observations made by Curtis (2016) on the work of political technologists to consolidate the rule of Vladimir Putin. Curtis asserts that these 'grey viziers' had "turned politics into a strange theatre where nobody knew what was true or what was fake any longer."<sup>129</sup> Vladislav Surkov, however, took this game to another level: "Surkov's aim was not just to manipulate people but to go deeper and play with and undermine their very perception of the world so they are never sure what is really happening."<sup>130</sup> Key to Surkov's mind tricks was that he "then let it be known that this was what he was doing, which meant that no one was sure what was real or what was fake in modern Russia."<sup>131</sup> And just most recently, Surkov can be viewed to have done it again: In *Dolgoe gosudarstvo Putina*, Surkov distances himself from his earlier machinations, namely of the system of 'suverennaja demokratija', asserting now that all Western-style democratic institutions in Russia are nothing but

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. Wilson, A. (2005). *Virtual politics: Faking democracy in the post-Soviet world*. New York: Yale University Press, cited from Pynnöniemi & Rácz (2016), p. 44.

<sup>126</sup> Pynnöniemi & Rácz (2016), p. 44.

<sup>127</sup> See Wilson, A. (2011, June 17). "Political technology": why is it alive and flourishing in the former USSR? *openDemocracy*. Retrieved 8. May 2019 from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/political-technology-why-is-it-alive-and-flourishing-in-former-ussr/>.

<sup>128</sup> Wilson, A. (2011, June 19).

<sup>129</sup> Curtis, A. (2016). *HyperNormalisation* (Documentary). BBC. Retrieved 04. May 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fh2cDKyFdyU>, 2:22:25 – 2:22:35.

<sup>130</sup> Curtis (2016), 2:24:00 – 2:24:15.

<sup>131</sup> Curtis (2016), 2:24:50 – 2:25:05; For a similar discussion on Surkov, cf. Kakutani, M. (2018). *The death of truth: Notes on falsehood in the age of Trump* (First ed.). New York: Tim Duggan Books, pp. 144-49.

‘fancy clothing’ that Russians don for show, and that autocracy really makes for the only viable political system in Russia.<sup>132</sup> And, what is more, the people allegedly feel so as well:

Перенятые у Запада многоуровневые политические учреждения... Они как выходная одежда, в которой идут к чужим, а у себя мы по-домашнему, каждый про себя знает, в чем... По существу же общество доверяет только первому лицу.<sup>133</sup>

The multi-level political institutions we adopted from the West... They are like fancy clothing in which everyone slips in like stranger, but deep down everyone knows where we actually lie... Essentially, society trusts only the number one person.<sup>134</sup>

Forever flamboyant, Surkov delivers yet another example of the vanguard mentality of the elite, imposing the political system of autocracy on the population.

One might pause for a moment and ask – what is the meaning behind all this? Quoting Pomerantsev (2011), Curtis suggests that it, essentially, constitutes “a strategy of power based on keeping any opposition there may be constantly confused, a ceaseless shape-shifting that is unstoppable because it’s indefinable.”<sup>135</sup> And thus, we have arrived at the centre of the current global debate on fake news and the era of post-truth, in a mix with the brutal politics of power – the quintessence, some argue, of the current state-run nation-building project in Russia. In this context, as put forward by Pomerantsev & Weiss (2014),

this shape-shifting context, which endures today, all political philosophy becomes political technology, and the point of ideas and language are not what they represent, but what function they fulfill. The point of any statement is its effect rather than any notion of truth.<sup>136</sup>

These theses are important because what they imply is nothing less than that the meaning of language could well be lost here. Instead, it is the *effect* of linguistic utterances that matters. On the whole, this would mean that any symbol allows being exploited as long as it serves the consolidation of the sacrosanct Russian state<sup>137</sup> and the affirmation of its and its leaders

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<sup>132</sup> See also Robinson, P. (2019, February 11).

<sup>133</sup> Surkov (2019, February 11).

<sup>134</sup> What regards the translation of this passage from Russian to English, the author of this essay chose a free approach. The term used by Surkov, ‘vychodnaja odezda’ (выходная одежда), would literally denote ‘weekend clothes’ – which I here decided to translate to the more idiomatic ‘fancy clothing.’

<sup>135</sup> Pomerantsev, P. (2011). Putin’s Rasputin. *London Review of Books*, 33(20), pp. 3-6. Retrieved 10 May from <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n20/peter-pomerantsev/putins-rasputin>. See also Curtis (2016), 2:25:00-2:25:15.

<sup>136</sup> Pomerantsev, P. & Weiss, M. (2014) *The menace of unreality: How the Kremlin weaponizes information, culture and money*. New York: Institute of Modern Russia [online]. Retrieved 6. Mar. 2019 from [https://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Michael\\_Weiss\\_and\\_Peter\\_Pomerantsev\\_\\_The\\_Menace\\_of\\_Unreality.pdf](https://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Michael_Weiss_and_Peter_Pomerantsev__The_Menace_of_Unreality.pdf), p. 10.

<sup>137</sup> See the documentary by *The Economist* (2018, July 17) where a revitalized Orthodox Church is portrayed sanctifying the Russian state and the rule of the head of state, Vladimir Putin. Cf. *The Economist* (2018, July 17).

unconditional righteousness.<sup>138</sup> As Snyder cunningly puts it: “The axiom of perfect Russian innocence permit[s] endless Russian imagination.”<sup>139</sup>

Now, after having added some necessary context to our initial terminological approximations, this paper suggests going for a rather flexible, or, if you will, *hybrid* definition of propaganda. In Bernays’ terms, I would argue that Russian state-propaganda could be viewed to create both order and chaos. Order, to keep the nation in line, and chaos, in order to keep the nation confused.

Against this critical contextualisation, let us now move on to the analysis of Dmitrij Kiselëv’s *Vesti nedeli*.

### 3. *Vesti nedeli*: Analytical considerations

#### 3.1. The Power of TV

The choice of television as the primary source material for our linguistic investigation is based on the fact that TV, as of 2019, constitutes the most outstanding media in Russia. The following words of Pomerantsev are, thus, still topical: “TV is the only force that can unify and rule and bind this country. It’s the central mechanism of a new type of authoritarianism, one far subtler than twentieth-century strains.”<sup>140</sup> Further, according to an August 2018 survey, as many as 73% of respondents indicated TV as their primary source of information.<sup>141</sup>

Of special interest to the study, moreover, is the relationship between TV and its recipients. Interestingly, one could easily single out a handful of TV broadcasters, whose shows, firstly, are watched the most and, secondly, in whom the recipients indicate having the greatest confidence.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Cf. Lipman (2015), p. 126.

<sup>139</sup> Snyder (2018), p. 156.

<sup>140</sup> Pomerantsev (2014a), p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> It is worth noting, however, that during recent years the Internet and social networks have strengthened their positions considerably. The section “online publications” (newspapers, magazines, information portals) reached 37% according to an August 2018 survey, marking a significant development from measurements made only five months prior in March, where the figure read 27 %. See Levada-centr (2018, September). The positive development in online publications further correlates with the negative developments in watchers of TV news broadcasts, where the figure in March 2018 read 85% and in August, as already stated above, 73%. See Levada-centr (2018, September). *Kanally informacii*. Retrieved 5. Apr. 2019 from <https://www.levada.ru/2018/09/13/kanaly-informatsii/>.

<sup>142</sup> This idea is inspired by Richard Bærug’s (2018) exhaustive study on Russian media and propaganda. Cf. Bærug (2018), p. 26.

According to a March 2018 survey, the leading pair as to hosts of TV-programs with informative and political content constitutes of broadcasters Vladimir Solov'ëv and Dmitrij Kiselëv (both *Rossija-1*).<sup>143</sup> From between the two, I have chosen to focus on Kiselëv's weekly Sunday analytical news show. The choice makes for a rather obvious one: In 2013, president Putin appointed Kiselëv to head the government-owned news agency conglomerate *Rossija Segodnja* (Russia Today) and, on top of that, Kiselëv finds himself on the European Union's list of sanctions due to his central role as a government propagandist supporting the deployment of Russian forces in Ukraine.<sup>144</sup>

Further, I intend to draw from Stanley's reflections on the force of speech acts in contexts of asymmetric communication. According to Stanley, figures "in the media, as well as teachers in school, exploit their position as epistemic authorities to issue assertions that are not supposed to be taken as proposals, but as commands."<sup>145</sup> Stanley argues his point by pointing to the "fundamentally asymmetric" relationship between newscaster and audience, noting that "[t]elling someone something from a position of authority is a *command*, not an assertion; it is what Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron call a 'game of fictitious communication.'<sup>146</sup> After having expanded on press-state relations in Russia, I would even argue that Kiselëv does not only present the news with his authority but with all the authority of the Russian state.

As to the relevant timeframe for the collection of the linguistic data, this study, for the sake of scientific validity and actuality, has arbitrarily chosen the month of March 2019. With five shows this adds up to slightly less than nine hours of video material.

### 3.2. Distinctive vocabularies and narratives

With the Russia-West divide running as deep as it does in the Russian national story, I intend to commence my scan of Kiselëv's March 2019 shows by pinpointing, first, positive self-

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<sup>143</sup> See Levada-centr (2018, April). *Informacionnye istočniki, 18.04.2018*. Retrieved 5. Apr. 2019 from <https://www.levada.ru/2018/04/18/informatsionnye-istochniki/>. For a similar approach but with reference to older surveys, cf. Bærug (2018), p. 26.

<sup>144</sup> See Council Regulation (EU) No 269/2014 of 17 March 2014 concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2014/269/2014-03-21> (Accessed: 9 Apr. 2019); Cf. Bærug (2018), p. 26.

<sup>145</sup> Stanley (2015), p. 143.

<sup>146</sup> Stanley (2015), p. 143. For Stanley's reference to Bourdieu's and Passeron's theoretical reflections, cf. Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Translation by R. Nice. London: Sage, p. 319.

representations and, second, negative other-representations.<sup>147</sup> The findings are presented in Table 1, which features the categories “Russia” and “Others”. Against the background of our contextualisation, where the discursive practice of othering figures prominently, the focus of the subsequent analysis will lie on manifestations of negative other-representation. In connection to this, the video footage will be examined against the purpose of identifying *distinctive vocabularies*,<sup>148</sup> i.e. specific ‘lexico-grammar choices’<sup>149</sup> that are employed to facilitate the division into the ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Table 2). And as Pynnöniemi & Rącz shrewdly imply, it is within the framework provided by narratives that the distinctive vocabularies are put *into action*.<sup>150</sup> Following this train of thought, I argue that it is these vocabularies, paired with the negative-other and positive-self representations, that give life to the narratives, help constitute the imagined community of Russia and, ultimately, contribute to the formation of a Russian national identity.

Summing up, the national narratives identified and highlighted in the study so far are as follows:

- 1) The special bond between Russian ruler(s) and its people, i.e. the vertical dichotomy of the Russian idea à la Jangfeldt.
- 2) The besieged fortress, an overarching narrative that is here viewed to encompass both the horizontal dichotomy of the Russian idea, i.e. Russia’s relationship to its surroundings, as well as the claims of victimhood and innocence, which are viewed stemming from the Soviet experience in the Great Patriotic War.

Against the background of almost nine hours of video material, the upcoming critical analysis of Kiselëv’s March 2019 *Vesti nedeli* will primarily be of qualitative character. The qualitative scan of the linguistic data will, thus, aim at pinpointing passages that the present study considers as both drawing from the above Russian national narratives and, further, contributing to reproducing and forming these. On top of this, the upcoming analysis aims at highlighting linguistic data that the study considers relevant in regard to the established hallmarks of the inter-discourse communication between state and population. Here, data pointing towards acts of a ‘typically Russian’ amalgamation of past, present and future, as well as the specific vanguard mentality of the elite

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<sup>147</sup> Pasitselska (2017) makes use of the above terms, *positive self-representation* and *negative other-representation*, in her study on the Russian media’s coverage of the Ukrainian crisis, drawing from the work of Wodak (2006). Cf. Wodak, R. (2006). Blaming and denying: Pragmatics. In: K. Brown (ed.). *Encyclopedia of language & linguistics*. Oxford: Elsevier, pp. 59-64, cited from Pasitselska (2017), p. 595.

<sup>148</sup> See Pynnöniemi & Rącz (2016), p. 54-56.

<sup>149</sup> Pasitselska (2017), p. 597.

<sup>150</sup> Pynnöniemi & Rącz (2016), p. 55.

shall be of special interest.

### 3.3. ‘Us’ and ‘them’ defined: Categories of division

Touching on the above methodological considerations, the following listings (in alphabetical order), i.e. Table 1 and Table 2, focus on entities that were, against the background of our contextualisation, the established national narratives, and the hallmarks of inter-discourse communication, considered to be of significance to the present study. Thus, the listings should be considered as far from exhaustive. Nevertheless, the author of this study believes that they may help point to specific trends and styles by means of which the Russian nation is imagined into being, pointing to who or what are considered belonging to it, and to entities that are not.

**Table 1.** Russia and Others

Russia	Others
Dmitrij Medvedjev; Krym (Crimea); Pravoslavie (Orthodoxy); Rossija (Russia); Rossijskij (Citizen of the Russian Federation); Russkij (Ethnic Russian); Sily Special’nych Operacij (Special Operations Forces); Sovetskij Sojuz (Soviet Union); Stalin; Vladimir Putin; Vladimir Svjatoslavič (Vladimir the Great)	Amerikancy (Americans); Bežency (Refugees); Bill Clinton; Brjussel’ (Brussels); Donald Trump; Evropa (Europe); Evropejcy (Europeans); Evrosojuz (European Union); Freddy Mercury; George Soros; Germanija (Germany); Gitler (Hitler); IBM; IGIL (ISIS); Katolicizm (Catholicism); Latvija (Latvia); Litva (Lithuania); Michail Gorbačëv; Migranty (Migrants); NATO; Papa Pij 12:j (Pope Pius XII); Petro Porošenko; Pol’ša (Poland); Sojedinennye Štaty Ameriki (United States of America); Stalin; Švecija (Sweden); Thomas Watson; Ukraina (Ukraine); Ukraincy (Ukrainians); Velikobritanija (Great-Britain); Zapad (West); Zapadnaja Evropa (Western Europe); Želtje Žiletje (Yellow Vests)

Now, let us see which distinctive vocabularies have been employed in order to mark ‘us’, i.e. the Russian One, and ‘them’, the Other(s).

**Table 2.** Distinctive vocabularies: Marking ‘us’ and ‘them’

Marking ‘us’	Marking ‘them’
Bolšoj Stalin (Big Stalin); Doneckaja Narodnaja Respublika (Donetsk People’s Republic); Malen’kij Stalin (Little Stalin); Normal’naja seksual’naja orientacija (Normal sexual orientation); Otečestvo (Fatherland); Pakt zabvenija (Pact of oblivion); Raznopolyj (Heterosexual); Rodina (Motherland); Semejnye cennosti (Family values); Tradicionnye cennosti (Traditional values); Velikaja Otečestvennaja vojna (Great Patriotic War)	Agitatory (Agitators); Bandity (Bandits); Diversanty (Saboteurs); Džichadisty (Jihadists); Ekstremisty (Extremists); Fašisty (Fascists); Gej (Gay); Gitlerovskaja Germanija (Hitler-Germany); Gomoseksualisty (Homosexuals); Gosperevorot (Coup d’état); Islamisty (Islamists); Kapitalizm (Capitalism); Karateli (Punishers); Korrupcija (Corruption); Lesbijanka (Lesbian); LGBT; Liberal’nyj (Liberal); Nacionalisty (Nationalists); Nacisty (Nazis); Nenormal’naja seksual’naja orientacija (Abnormal sexual orientation); Netradicionnaja orientacija (Non-traditional orientation); Netradicionnye cennosti (Non-traditional values); Oligarchy (Oligarchs); Pogromy (Pogroms); Politkorrektnost’ (Political correctness); Radikaly (Radicals); Terroristy (Terrorists); Varvarskij (Barbaric);

Equipped with these demarcations and distinctive vocabularies, let us commence the qualitative analysis of *Vesti nedeli*.

#### **4. *Vesti nedeli s Dmitriem Kiselëvym*: Analysis**

Before embarking on the analysis of the weekly Sunday analytical news show, *Vesti nedeli s Dmitriem Kiselëvym*,<sup>151</sup> a few words should be said to the layout of the show itself. During each session, the host of the show Kiselëv presents his audience a selection of news stories from the past week that are considered most important. Kiselëv then provides the stories with commentary and analysis and it is precisely this commentary that is of interest to this study. The news stories broadcasted make for interesting data as well, to be sure, but it is Kiselëv’s epistemic authority that this study considers to be of higher relevance for a critical analysis of the Russian national discourse.<sup>152</sup>

To begin with, this essay wishes to point to themes that have not featured in the reflections so far:

<sup>151</sup> In English: *The News of the Week with Dmitrij Kiselëv*.

<sup>152</sup> The newscasts of Rossija-1 were only available in video format and, thus, the relevant passages have been transcribed by the author of this essay.

Russia's fight against international terrorism, Russia's relation to migrants and refugees, and the complex issue of Russia-Ukraine relations – all nevertheless important building blocks of the imagined community of Russia, featuring text-book examples of the practice of othering.<sup>153</sup> Regarding terrorism, one could point to the news story covering the ten-year anniversary of a specialized Russian military unit, 'Sily Special'nyh Operacij', where Others are clearly marked with distinctive vocabulary like 'terroristy', 'bandity', 'radikaly', and 'ekstremisty'.<sup>154</sup> Similar vocabulary – e.g., 'džichadisty', 'islamisty', 'varvarskij' – is used in news stories pertaining to the Islamic State (IGIL) and Islamic terrorism.<sup>155</sup> The terms are used repeatedly, thus clearly emphasising Russia's contraposition to said organisation and terrorism in general. Further, these negative-other representations seem to reflect Russia's official rhetoric. Talking at a gathering in honour of the Russian Special Operations Forces, *Vesti nedeli* shows president Putin asserting the righteousness of the soldiers' actions in Syria and, further, on the Crimean peninsula:

Пят лет назад... бойцы и командиры «Сил Специальных Операций» сделали все, чтобы сохранить мир в Крыму и Севастополе. Защитить людей от насилия, от карателей,<sup>156</sup> чтобы никто не помешал гражданам сделать свободный, самостоятельный выбор на историческом референдуме. ... [Referring to their actions in Syria] Внесли огромный вклад в разгром террористических группировок, в освобождение сирийской земли от бандитов.<sup>157</sup>

Five years ago... the fighters and commanders of the "Special Operations Forces" did everything in their power to protect the peace on Crimea and in Sevastopol. They protected people against violence and against punishers, so that nobody could hinder the citizen to make their free and independent choice on the historic referendum. ... [Referring to their actions in Syria] They made a huge contribution to the crushing of terrorist groups in line with the liberation of Syrian land from bandits.

This positive representation of Russia's military and its actions can, furthermore, be viewed to invoke the perception of Russia as a great-power – a narrative encapsulated in the Russian term 'deržavnost''<sup>158</sup> – and to accentuate Russia's claim on Crimea.

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<sup>153</sup> The videos were accessed on the official YouTube channel of the state-owned company of VGTRK ('Vserossijskaja Gosudarstvennaja Televizionnaja i Radioveščatel'naja Kompanija', i.e. the 'All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company'). For the homepage of the YouTube channel, see [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC\\_IEcnNeHc\\_bwd92Ber-lew](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_IEcnNeHc_bwd92Ber-lew).

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Rossija 24. (2019, 3 March). *Vesti nedeli s Dmitriem Kiselëvym*. [Video]. Retrieved 9. May 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUszvhLID4o>, ca. 15:00–21:00.

<sup>155</sup> Rossija 24. (2019, 17 March). *Vesti nedeli s Dmitriem Kiselëvym*. [Video]. Retrieved 10. May 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQs7x7b4RiY&t=283s>, ca. 17:00 – 22:00.

<sup>156</sup> The implications of this specific word will be discussed but shortly.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Rossija 24. (2019, 3 March), ca. 19:50 – 20:30. The accentuations are made by the author (TT).

<sup>158</sup> 'Deržavnost'' denotes the "tradition of being a great geopolitical state power that commands the attention of other countries." In: Ostrovsky (2017), p. 264. Interestingly, deržavnost' found itself on Putin's list of traditional Russian values, which he laid out in his political manifesto in 1999. Cf. Putin (1999, December 30).

Further, the reference to George Soros<sup>159</sup> (see Table 1, ‘Others’) should be addressed. Commenting on a report covering demographic change in Hungary, Kiselëv portrays Soros as an aider and abettor of illegal immigration in Europe.<sup>160</sup> Migrants and refugees (bežency) are, further, regarded as the cause for Hungary’s problems. Furthermore, the report on Hungary can be viewed carrying xenophobic and racist undertones, which becomes clear as the camera focuses on a man of colour while the reporter (not Kiselëv) is referring to “čužaki” (strangers).<sup>161</sup> As to the function of these practices, this essay suggests viewing them as measures aimed at strengthening Russia’s besieged fortress. The negative-other representation of migrants and refugees thus suggests their exclusion from the Russian national discourse.

Even though the complex issue of Ukraine-Russia relations has largely been omitted from the aims of this paper, the prevalence of the Ukrainian Other in the March 2019 shows nevertheless requires our attention. Throughout the broadcasts, aggressive othering is directed especially at the person of Petro Porošenko, the president of Ukraine (2014-19).<sup>162</sup> In Porošenko’s case, one could even point to a practice of dehumanization – manifest in the fact that Kiselëv repeatedly calls him by an alleged nickname of his, “Porky.”<sup>163</sup> Further, Ukraine is constantly shown in a state of turmoil, a state caused partly by the ‘president of war’ (prezident vojny) Porošenko and, to some extent, Ukrainian ‘oligarchs’.<sup>164</sup> Here, one could argue, the connection in Russian minds goes to the chaotic 90s, an image that, further, is linked to the influence of oligarchs. Thus, the purpose of such discursive practices might well be the implication of stability at home but, also, the fanning of anti-Ukrainian sentiment.

Moreover, the discourse regarding Ukraine has witnessed the activation of specific war-related lingua or, more specifically, of terms pertaining to the Great Patriotic War. Amongst these count signifiers like ‘karateli’, ‘diversanty’, and the better-known ‘fašisty’ and ‘nacisty.’ Even used by Putin in the speech above, the term ‘karateli’, for example, was found to feature in all but the show

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<sup>159</sup> George Soros is a prominent Hungarian-American billionaire and philanthropist, known for his philanthropic agency Open Societies Foundation.

<sup>160</sup> «Сорос как сообщник нелегальной иммиграции в Европу». In: Rossiya 24. (2019, 3 March), ca. 57:30 – 57:50.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Ibid., ca. 01:05:40 – 01:06:15.

<sup>162</sup> When submitting this essay, Porošenko no longer serves as the president of Ukraine. On May 20, 2019, his successor Volodymyr Zelenskij was sworn into office.

<sup>163</sup> See e.g., Rossiya 24. (2019, 17 March), 43:20 – 01:08:00; Rossiya 24. (2019, 31 March). *Vesti nedeli s Dmitriem Kiselëvym*. [Video]. Retrieved 11. May 2019 from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGL\\_pnGwqpQ&t=142s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGL_pnGwqpQ&t=142s), 00:00 – 18:00. Kiselëv uses the English word “Porky” in reference to the Western cartoon character of “Porky Pig”.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Rossiya 24. (2019, 10 March). *Vesti nedeli s Dmitriem Kiselëvym*. [Video]. Retrieved 9. May 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKwT61-bRQE&t=1s>, ca. 6:50 – 18:00; see also Rossiya 24. (2019, 31 March), ca. 54:00 – 59:00.

on March 10. When put to action, the term ‘karateli’ (punisher), as Pynnöniemi & Rácz put forward, “activates the historical memory of Nazi atrocities against civilians on occupied territory.”<sup>165</sup> Thus, Kiselëv and his team of on-ground reporters propose to the domestic audience to evaluate the current situation in Ukraine as a Nazi occupation or, more specifically, the Ukrainian government troops fighting in the Donbas area of eastern Ukraine as Nazi occupants. In a manner similar to the ‘Ukrainian nightmare’ (ukrainskij košmar), *Vesti nedeli* even reported from the streets of Paris, with Kiselëv going as far as referring to the Yellow Vest protests as ‘pogroms’ (pogromy).<sup>166</sup> But back to Ukraine: Even though multiple efforts are made in conjunction with reports from the so-called ‘Doneckaja Narodnaja Respublika’ to highlight Russian non-participation in the ongoing war,<sup>167</sup> one thing is certain – the Ukrainian ‘karateli’ and ‘fašisty’ are stripped of all legitimacy in the conflict. Instead, Others – here: Europe and the United States – are blamed for Ukraine’s ‘civil war’ (graždanskaja vojna). In his analysis, Kiselëv portrays Ukraine as Europe’s ‘responsibility’ (otvetstvennost’):

Размышляя об Украине, невольно приходишь к мысли, что это Европа соблазнила страну – напустив розовый туман, дав надежду и даже гарантии мирного перехода власти в 2014:ом году. А потом хладнокровно бросила украинцев разбираться со своими нациками, с коррумпированным Порошенко и гражданской войной на востоке. Можно сколько угодно ругать Америку, мол, так подогрела госпереворот, но Европа - то куда смотрела. Ведь под ее флагом кипел Майдан....<sup>168</sup>

When reflecting on Ukraine, one involuntarily comes to think that it is Europe who seduced the country – letting in a pink fog and giving hope for a peaceful succession of power in 2014. Then only to cold-bloodedly throw the Ukrainians to deal with their Nazis, with the corrupt Porošenko and with the civil war in the East. One can scold America what regards the ignition of the coup d'état but Europe did nothing but watch. Indeed, it was under her flag that Majdan started boiling...

In regard to Ukrainian Nationalist Socialists, Kiselëv even makes use of an inferiorizing device, calling them ‘naciki’, a diminutive of ‘nacisty’, thus cementing Russian superiority over the Ukrainian Other. Further, Europe is portrayed as having seduced and confused Ukraine, having let into Ukraine a ‘pink fog’, a choice of words that this paper suggests regarding as an implication to yet another prevalent element of the discourse spurred on by Kiselëv – the theme of homosexual-otherness. In addition to othering Ukraine and Europe, the above passage includes another distinctive term – ‘gosperevorot’ – an undertaking that Kiselëv’s attributes to the United States. Short for ‘gosudarstvennyj perevorot’ (coup d'état) and against the backdrop of our

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<sup>165</sup> Pynnöniemi & Rácz (2016), p. 72. Here, Pynnöniemi & Rácz base their reflections on the work of Gaufman (2015), cf. Gaufman, E. (2015). Memory, media, and securitization: Russian media framing of the Ukrainian crisis. In: J. Fedor (ed.). *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society. Russian media and the war in Ukraine*, Vol. 1, No.1, p. 154.

<sup>166</sup> See Rossija 24. (2019, 17 March), ca. 12:30 – 16:00; see also Rossija 24. (2019, 24 March). *Vesti nedeli s Dmitriem Kiselëvym*. [Video]. Retrieved 11. May 2019 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wamzu0CPG8U>, ca. 01:13:30.

<sup>167</sup> See Rossija 24. (2019, 17 March), ca. 01:00:00 – 01:08:00; see also Rossija 24. (2019, 31 March), ca. 41:50 – 53:30.

<sup>168</sup> Rossija 24. (2019, 31 March), ca. 53:20 – 54:00.

contextualisation, Kiselëv thus reproduces the image of the United States meddling in other countries internal affairs.

Let us now move on to coverage pertaining to the vertical dichotomy of the Russian idea, the special bond between the Russian ruler, Putin, and his subjects, the ‘rossijskie’ people. It comes as no surprise that the Russian head of state (glava gosudarstva) gets a fair share of coverage in Kiselëv’s news show. Putin is shown interacting with different social groups, taking care of problems and, in general, steering Russia forward. Also, Putin is depicted fostering good relations to other great-powers, such as for example India, and promoting peace abroad. Reporting on a phone call between Putin and India’s premier minister Modi, Kiselëv states the following:

При этом Путин выразил надежду, что кризисная ситуация между Индией и Пакистаном вскоре будет урегулирована. В Индии этот телефонный звонок Путина имел широкий положительный резонанс.<sup>169</sup>

During this [phone call], Putin expressed the hope that the crisis situation between India and Pakistan would soon be resolved. In India, Putin’s phone call had a wide positive resonance.

Further, what regards the special bond between ruler(s) and ruled, Putin is multiple times shown mingling, talking, and laughing with different social groups all across Russia. On international women’s day (March 8), for example, Putin is first covered giving a televised speech to Russia’s women – during which he according to Kiselëv found “very warm and kind words”<sup>170</sup> – and, further, is shown complementing a group of female mounted police on their looks, laughing with them, and even riding a horse amongst them.<sup>171</sup> Further, Putin is depicted giving orders and telling state-officials how to do their jobs and, additionally, stating that he will be monitoring their work closely.<sup>172</sup> Thus, the historic image of a strict but benevolent ruler looking out for the best of his people is reproduced on Russian TV.

Even Kiselëv himself can be quoted referring to Putin’s positive character. Commenting on a series of statements where Putin, over a span of several years, is shown communicating the need to change some of the out-dated criminal laws in Russia, Kiselëv calls him “consistent” and “tireless.”<sup>173</sup> In line with Kiselëv’s commentary on this news piece and, especially, his interpretation of a speech

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<sup>169</sup> Rossiya 24. (2019, 3 March), ca. 03:20 – 03:40.

<sup>170</sup> «Президент страны нашел очень теплые и добрые слова». In: Rossiya 24. (2019, 10 March): ca. 29:45 – 30:20.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. (2019, 10 March), ca. 30:25 – 31:35.

<sup>172</sup> See e.g., Rossiya 24. (2019, 3 March), ca. 28:00 – 31:00.

<sup>173</sup> «Путин последователен и неутомим.» In Rossiya 24. (2019, 24 March), ca. 01:00:00 – 01:00:05.

Putin gave at a meeting with Russia's Prosecutor-General's Office Board on March 19,<sup>174</sup> I now want to point to some of the more interesting findings of this study. These findings encapsulate Russia's complex and oftentimes problematic relationship to its past, a relationship that manifests itself in the person and legacy of Josif Stalin. What Stalin's legacy is concerned, Kiselëv already took up the subject in a show two weeks earlier (March 10), stating that every historical figure comes with its contradictions, with its positive and negative sides. According to the journalist, there are many in Russia who worships him but, also, many who hate him. However, Kiselëv also stated the following about "generalissimo"<sup>175</sup> Stalin:

Как-никак, главнокомандующий победы<sup>176</sup> и провел страну от деревянной сохи до ядерной державы – факт.<sup>177</sup>

After all, he was the commander-in-chief in victory and led the country from wooden ploughs to nuclear power – a fact.

Again, the narrative of Russia as a great-power makes an appearance. Furthermore, Kiselëv introduces a certain notion to his audiences – the "pact of forgetting" (pakt zabvenija) – a pact that according to him was made silently by the Russian people in regard to certain historical figures and events:

В России негласно заключен своего рода «пакт забвения». По тем или иным причинам мы до сих пор не можем прийти к согласию по поводу этих исторических фигур.<sup>178</sup> Если так, то отложим этот спор еще на неопределённое время. Мы также не можем прийти к согласию и по нашей революции 1917:ого года. И ее столетие прошло столь тихо, что будто и не было юбилея: Ни одного центрального мероприятия, не речей, не парада. Значит, пока не переварили. А если так – лучше штиль забвения.

Russia saw the conclusion of an own kind of "pact of forgetting." For one reason or another, we still cannot reach an agreement what these historic figures are concerned. If such is the case, then we are postponing this dispute for a time infinite. We seem, further, not to be able to come to terms with our revolution of 1917. Its centenary passed so quietly, as if there had been no anniversary at all: Not one central event was organized, no speeches were held, and no parade. Meaning that it has yet not been digested. And if that is the case, then calm forgetting makes for the better option.

On one hand, the above words allow for the interpretation of Kiselëv grasping the set of problems affiliated with the notion of not getting to terms with one's history. But on the other, he also seems to suggest that if the remembrance of certain historic events were to bring about disquiet and

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<sup>174</sup> For Vladimir Putin's speech at the Prosecutor-General's, cf. Prezident Rossii (2019, March 19). *Zasedanie kollegii Genprokuratory Rossii* [Transcript]. Retrieved 13. May 2019 from <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60100>.

<sup>175</sup> Kiselëv, here, makes use of the Russian term 'generalissimus.'

<sup>176</sup> Kiselëv is here referring to the victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War.

<sup>177</sup> *Rossija* 24. (2019, 10 March), ca. 55:30 – 56:35.

<sup>178</sup> By these 'historic figures', Kiselëv refers to Stalin, among others, but, also, for example, to Vladimir Svjatoslavič, the monarch responsible for the Christianization of Kievan Rus', the cultural ancestor of, among others, Russia.

commotion amongst the people, the public would be better off with ‘calm forgetting’ (štil’ zabvenija). Hereupon Kiselëv guides his audience further to Spain, where the original pact of forgetting (Pacto del olvido) was forged by all sides of the political spectrum in an attempt to shake of the period of Francoism and the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Kiselëv explains the pact of forgetting as follows:

Идея «пакта забвения» состояла в том, чтобы сфокусироваться на будущем, а не на прошлом. Не превращать друг друга во врагов, а объединить усилия по строительству новой жизни.<sup>179</sup>

The idea behind the “pact of forgetting” lied in the prospect of focusing on the future, and not on the past. The idea was not to turn each other into enemies but to join efforts in the building of a new life.

In retrospect, Kiselëv can thus be viewed to have laid the groundwork for future discourse. And the time to spur on this discourse would come already two weeks later, in the context provided by Putin’s speech at the meeting with the Prosecutor-Generals. Kiselëv evidently reinterprets Putin’s words, a fact that Kiselëv himself acknowledges, and suddenly preaches a different kind of forgetting – a forgetting with a smack of, oddly enough, remembrance:

Во вторник президент России Путин выступал на расширенной коллегии генпрокуратуры. Понятно, что глава государства призывал строго следить за соблюдением закона в стране, но при этом был куда более широкий посыл, обращенный к прокурорам – выдавливать из себя Сталина. Конечно, Путин говорил другими словами, но смысл был именно таким. Как Чехов призывал выдавливать из себя по капле раба, так Путин призывал выдавливать из себя маленького Сталина. Не того большого, что модернизировал промышленность, с чьим именем связана победа над гитлеровским фашизмом и создание ядерного щита родины, за что мы не можем не быть благодарны Сталину до сих пор – а того маленького Сталина, что сидит в нас и по сей день. Того, кто считал человека пылью и прямо по-садистски лишал людей свободы.

On Tuesday, president Putin spoke at an extended board meeting of the Prosecutor-General’s council. While understandable that the head of state called for strict compliance with the law in the country, there was even a somewhat broader message communicated to the Prosecutor – to squeeze Stalin out of oneself. Of course, Putin said it in different words but the meaning was exactly this. Like Čechov appealed to, drop by drop, squeeze out the slave of oneself, Putin now appealed to squeeze out of oneself little Stalin. Not that big Stalin, who modernized the industry and whose name is associated with the victory over Hitler-fascism and the formation of a nuclear shield over the Motherland but, instead, that little Stalin, who sits inside us until this day. That Stalin who regarded humans as dust and in an outright sadistic manner deprived people of their freedom.

One can hear the bells of contradiction chiming. On one hand, we have ‘little Stalin’, the neurotic dictator responsible for the extermination of millions of Soviet citizens and, on the other, we have ‘big Stalin’, the embodiment of the value of deržavnost’ and vanquisher of ‘Hitler-fascism’, the great historical Other. What the epithets ‘malen’kij’ and ‘bol’šoj’ are concerned, this paper suggest viewing them as what they are – value judgements. But in order to prevent any hasty conclusions, I

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<sup>179</sup> Both this quote and the one before are retrieved from Rossija 24. (2019, 10 March), ca. 1:00:40 – 01:04:00.

suggest we see how Kiselëv continues to form the subject matter and, further, Russian national identity:

В нас эта традиция репрессий, надо признать, все еще теплится. Если угодно, репрессивное мышление – часть нашей культуры, которая чудесным образом все воспроизводится в недрах нашего госаппарата. Путин прямо тащит все общество и всю систему из этого болота, а мы – нет. Не каждый, конечно, но как сложившаяся культурная конструкция мы пассивно сопротивляемся. А Путин все тащит. И просит: «меньше сажайте людей в неволю.» А мы все сажаем. Прямо сладострастно. Достоевский, наверное, такое бы слово сюда подобрал. ... Да, наша родная репрессивная культура внутри нас. Маленький Сталин не дает. Культура, нравы, не меняются быстро.<sup>180</sup>

One has to acknowledge that this tradition of repression still flickers inside of us. If you like, repressive thinking is part of our culture, all of which, in a miraculous fashion, is reproduced in the bowels of our state-apparatus. Putin is straight-out dragging the whole society out of this swamp, but we – no. Not all of us, of course, but as a complex cultural construction we passively resist this. But Putin continues to drag. And asks: “Put less people in captivity.” But we still continue to incarcerate people. In a positively lustful manner. Dostojevskij would, probably, have used a similar wording here. ... Yes, we carry our repressive culture inside us. Little Stalin gives no quarter. Culture and customs, they do not change quickly.

Many things can be noted here. First, Kiselëv can be viewed to stimulate Russian cultural memory by referring to two known Russian authors, Anton Čechov and Fëdor Dostojevskij, thereby seeking to legitimize his arguments. Further, Kiselëv puts forward that repression constitutes a part of Russian culture. Moreover, ‘repressive thinking’ does not only occur in the bowels of the Russian state-apparatus, no, Kiselëv suggests that inside every Russian there resides a ‘little Stalin.’ Apart from incorporating the dark period of Stalinism into the Russian present – a practice that can be viewed stemming from Putin’s speech at the Valdai Club, where he suggests that *all* of Russia’s pasts should be incorporated into the construct of a Russian national identity (rossijskaja identičnost’) – the question about what the concept of a ‘little Stalin’ actually means remains. One could try to approach Kiselëv’s metaphor as a painful reminder of days past, of the horrors it entails, but that would only be partly right. With Kiselëv’s earlier pronouncements of ‘little Stalin’ signifying the sadistic and repressive side of the ‘generalissimus’, one could also put forward that, in effect, Kiselëv is suggesting that inside every Russian there dwells a repressor.

Instead of dwelling on uncertainties and speculation, however, this essay proposes working with what we know and have established so far. Against our theoretical background, I thus suggest regarding Kiselëv’s above interpretations as a prime example of the specific bolševik vanguard mentality of a self-appointed elite. What Kiselëv does here, effectively, is impose a perception on his audiences of a Russian people lusting for repression, craving for the strong hand of a central

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<sup>180</sup> Both this quote and the one before are retrieved from: Rossiya 24. (2019, 24 March), ca. 49:30 – 1:05:00.

authority. Putin is depicted as attempting to pull the Russian people and Russian culture out of a ‘swamp’ of repression, and the people are portrayed as resisting this change. Apart from the vanguard mentality of projecting progress on a ‘backward’ population, I am further reminded by Bernays’ reflections on the two different types of propaganda. According to these, one type of propaganda describes the dissemination of chaos instead of order. Thus, Kiselëv’s intention could be to utterly confuse his audience. Also, the fundamentally asymmetric relationship between Kiselëv and his audience leaves no room for debate, no room for questions, leaving the recipient alone with these commands to add this contradictory building block to the story of the Russian nation. What is more, Kiselëv’s coverage of Stalin in this contradictory manner can be viewed pointing to yet another trend – the normalisation of Stalin into the Russian public sphere.

Adding to the contradictoriness of Kiselëv’s story on Putin’s attempts to ‘squeeze out’ Stalin of the Russian national body, is the circumstance that the TV-host in the show airing on March 10 specifically referred to a specific ‘pendulum of public opinion’ regarding norms on the global arena – and depicted this pendulum as swinging backwards, towards more conservatism:

Пару недель назад мы говорили, что маятник в общественных представлениях о норме обязательно качнется назад. А политкорректность и терпимость к извращениям кончится.<sup>181</sup>

A couple of weeks ago we said that the pendulum of public perception regarding the norm is swinging backwards. And that political correctness and tolerance of perversion are coming to an end.

Applying Reddaway & Glinski’s pendulum-metaphor to Kiselëv’s perception on the course of history might be ill-advised but, the way the political scientists understand it, a development towards less repression would mean that the pendulum in Russia was slowly swinging in the opposite direction than what Kiselëv here suggests. Interestingly, Kiselëv here links the concepts of ‘political correctness’ and ‘tolerance of perversion’ together, hereby clearly excluding them from the discourse of Russian national culture. Also, the above quote is even supposed to signal a turn to the next set of data, the data on traditional and non-traditional values. Or in other words, the purported difference between Russia and the West.

In adherence to the values laid out by Putin at the Valdai Club, *Vesti nedeli* contains numerous negative-other representations in connection to such distinctive vocabulary as ‘netradicionnye’ and ‘nenormal’nye cennosti’. Further, the concepts of ‘gomoseksualizm’ (homosexuality) and ‘lesbijanstvo’ (lesbianism) can be viewed as markers of exclusion from the Russian world. What is

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<sup>181</sup> Rossiya 24. (2019, 10 March), ca. 01:11:00 – 01:12:00.

more, this exclusion is further facilitated by the authority of the Orthodox Church. After showing video footage on a gay parade in Sweden, an Orthodox priest is interviewed saying the following:

Потеря традиционных ценностей, семейных ценностей – вот это вот самое важное. А уже когда это выходит на совсем такие дикие формы. Там гомосексуализм и лесбиянство. Это, мне кажется, уже близко по... полного разрушения общества.<sup>182</sup>

The loss of traditional values, of family values – that is the most important thing here. And also when it takes such wild forms. There is homosexuality and lesbianism. I think that is already close to... a total destruction of society.

Thus, Kiselëv's broadcast positions itself clearly as a proponent of 'traditional family values', in contrast to Sweden and, further, Europe. The image of Europe as morally decadent has thus staged its comeback into the Russian mediasphere as well. Furthermore, *Vesti nedeli's* depiction of the Orthodox Church functioning as the moral backbone of society can be viewed echoing the official Kremlin rhetoric, with Putin's speech at the Valdai Club showing the way.

Even Russia's most significant Other of today's day and age, the United States, is imagined amidst a downward spiral. Kiselëv sees this process manifesting itself vividly in the decay of American culture, with the ceremony of the 91<sup>st</sup> Academy Awards ("Oscars") in Los Angeles functioning as a prime example. Marking this trend, according to Kiselëv, is the prevalent 'theme of homosexuality':

[Е]сть в современной американской культуре нечто обязательное и без чего церемония вручения «Оскара» не может состояться: это гомосексуальная тема. ... Лучший фильм, *Зеленая книга*, где герой: гей. «Оскар» за лучшую мужскую роль, Рами Малек, исполнил Фредди Меркури с нетрадиционной ориентацией. ... Из Меркури вышла мелкая, суетливая личность. ... «Оскар» за лучшую женскую роль Оливия Колман сыграла королеву-лесбиянку в картине *Фаворитка*... Блестящий фильм Павликовского, *Холодная война*, [о] любви разнополой пары не получил вообще ничего.<sup>183</sup>

There exists something in contemporary American culture without which the "Oscar" ceremony simply could not take place: the homosexual theme. ... The best picture, *Green Book*, features a hero who is gay. The winner of the "Oscar" for the best male role, Rami Malek, played the non-traditionally oriented Freddy Mercury... Thus, Mercury became a flat and fussy character. ... Olivia Colman, who played a lesbian Queen in the movie *The Favourite*, won the "Oscar" for best female role... Pawlikowski's brilliant film, *Cold War*, about the love of an opposite-sex couple, did not win anything at all.

In the example above, Kiselëv does not merely mark Others by pointing out their sexual orientations, he links these 'non-traditional' orientations to the quality of the movies the actors and actresses feature in. Consequently, these movies turned out to be of lower quality than Kiselëv's

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<sup>182</sup> Rossija 24. (2019, 3 March), ca. 01:04:45 – 01:05:05. What the grammatical errors in the last sentence are concerned, the translator is of the firm conviction that they were made by the interviewed in question (TT).

<sup>183</sup> What the bracketed Russian word and letter 'o' (here: 'about') is concerned, I have added it to the transcript. Even though I could not discern it being said by Kiselëv in the broadcast, the sentence would not make for a grammatically correct one without it (TT).

favourite amongst this year's nominees, Paweł Pawlikowski's *Cold War*, which unique selling point is that it features an opposite-sex couple, i.e. a couple embodying 'traditional values'.

Kiselëv, however, does not stop at that. In a mock attempt of impartiality, the high-ranking media manager refers to the concepts of cultural differences and sovereignty, marking that one should not be afraid to be different:

Ведь не бояться отличаться китайцы не принимающие в своем идеале красоты веснушки.<sup>184</sup> И не бояться отличаться американцы, где пропуск на «Оскар» – благословение от ЛГБТ. Мы же не те и не другие. У нас своя культура, богатая и мощная. Сохраним нашу культуру – наша культура сохранит нас.<sup>185</sup>

After all, the Chinese are not afraid to not accept freckles to their beauty ideal. And the Americans are not afraid to be different either, where the pass to the "Oscar" gala is a blessing from the LGBT community. We, however, are neither one nor the other. We have our own culture, a rich and powerful culture. We protect our culture; our culture protects us.

Not stating anything directly, but by contrasting Russia's "rich and powerful" culture to that of the LGBT-United States, the practice of othering can be considered complete. Furthermore, the style by which Kiselëv here imagines the Russian nation can be viewed to come about with a certain 'weaponization of culture.' Appropriating Pomerantsev & Weiss' reflections on said practice, one could argue that Kiselëv's aim here is not to foster cross-cultural communication and understanding but, rather, "to use culture and ideas as tools to divide and rule, incite, corrupt and co-opt."<sup>186</sup> In this fashion, Kiselëv's weaponizes heterosexual culture in order to protect the besieged Russian fortress of 'traditional family values', aiming to keep the foreign influence of Gay-Europe and, for that matter, Gay-America at bay.

The narrative of the besieged fortress, in conjunction with a call for Russia to follow its own special path, can even be viewed emanating from Kiselëv's below statements:

Россия не может позволить себе неблагоприятный предпринимательский и правовой климат внутри. Хотя бы потому, что вокруг нас среда столь химически агрессивна. Но если вовне России не все зависит от нас, то уж в своем отечестве мы сами творим свое счастье.<sup>187</sup>

Russia cannot afford an unfavourable business and legal climate within the country. Not in the least because the environment around us is so chemically aggressive. And even if not everything outside of Russia depends on us, at least in our own fatherland we build our own luck.

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<sup>184</sup> The context to the reference regarding freckles not being in accordance to the Chinese beauty ideal was provided by Kiselëv giving a presentation on Chinese culture, during which he emphasized China to be a country immensely proud of their culture. The overall positive presentation of China can be viewed to reflect Russia's good relations to China.

<sup>185</sup> Both this quote and the one before are retrieved from Rossija 24. (2019, 3 March), ca. 01:11:20 – 01:19:00.

<sup>186</sup> Pomerantsev & Weiss (2014), p. 18.

<sup>187</sup> Rossija 24. (2019, 24 March), ca. 01:04:25 – 01:05:25.

What the reference to Russia's 'chemically aggressive surroundings' further suggests, is that the almost thousand years old narrative of Russia being surrounded by enemies plays a central role in the story of the Russian nation even today.

Lastly, I intend to present a case where the "Kremlin's 'propagandist extraordinaire'"<sup>188</sup> kills two birds with one stone. The birds I am referring to are, first, the Catholic Church, here represented by Pope Pius VII († 1958), and second, the United States. The stone comes in form of current Russia's great historic Other, the adversary of the Great Patriotic War, 'Hitler-Germany'. Commenting on the news of the Vatican opening its archives on Pope Pius XII, a figure controversial due to his alleged connections to fascist European leaders of his time, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, Kiselëv, via a rather unexpected connection, identifies additional culprits in capitalist American corporations. With Kiselëv's presentation lasting for more than ten minutes, here are some of the key take-outs:

Еще Пия 12:ого иногда называют «Папой Гитлера». Если уж не прямо сотрудничал с Гитлером, то во всяком случае точно не осуждал истребление Гитлером евреев. ... [И]интерес к тому, кто и как сотрудничал с человеконенавистническим гитлеровским рейхом не ослабевает. Сама по себе история поучительна и показывает, сколь легко покупается западная мораль... Могли, например, США ввести тотальные санкции против гитлеровской Германии. Не ввели. Или могли, например, США ввести санкции против американских компаний, сотрудничающих с гитлеровской Германией. ... Но всех переплюнул нынешний мировой компьютерный гигант «IBM». <sup>189</sup> Первый президент компании «IBM» - Томас Ватсон. Не раз лично встречался с Гитлером и просто восхищался им. ... [В] годы Холокоста компания «IBM» Томаса Ватсона была у Гитлера на подряде по реализации дикого плана уничтожения евреев. Выражаясь современным языком, «IBM» обеспечила людоедскому проекту Гитлера цифровизацию. ... Считается, что в ходе Холокоста было уничтожено более шести миллионов евреев. Славян, русских, украинцев и белорусов ждала не лучшая судьба на востоке. По бредовой теории расового превосходства, что двигала Гитлером, славяне должны были освободить свою территорию под жизненное пространство немцам. Не вышло благодаря мощи организованного сопротивления в СССР и победе в Великой Отечественной войне. И ценой огромных жертв. Славян в ходе этой битвы все же погибло куда больше, чем евреев. Огромные потери понесли все национальности Советского Союза, который принял на себя главный удар в той грандиозной битве. Память о ней сохранится навсегда. А интерес, кто на чьей стороне тогда работал и воевал, кто просто ради денег, кто закрывал глаза, интерес ко всему этому тоже будет вечным. <sup>190</sup>

Still today, Pius XII is occasionally called "Hitler's Pope." Even if he did not directly cooperate with Hitler, he at any case did not condemn Hitler's extermination of the Jews. ... The interest in who cooperated with the misanthropic Reich of Hitler and in what way is not weakening. The story itself is educative and shows just how easily Western moral can be bought... The United States, for example, could have introduced total sanctions against Hitler-Germany. They, however, did not. Or the United

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<sup>188</sup> Kiselëv has been described as "the Kremlin's *Propagandiste Extraordinaire*" by EUvsDisinfo. See EUvsDisinfo. (2019, May 9). *The Half-Truth, a Little of the Truth and a Lot of Stuff Besides the Truth*. Retrieved 15. May from <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/a-disillusioned-democrat/>.

<sup>189</sup> I am here referring to the name of the American hardware company, "International Business Machines Corporation" (IBM) in Latin characters.

<sup>190</sup> Rossiya 24. (2019, 10 March), ca. 39:30 – 50:30.

States could have, for example, introduced sanctions against American corporations that cooperated with Hitler-Germany. ... But all were outdone by the current global computer giant “IBM.” The first president of IBM was Thomas Watson. He met with Hitler more than once and simply adored him. ... And for the fact that during the Holocaust the company IBM was contracted by Hitler for the realization of the savage plan to exterminate the Jews. Phrased in contemporary language, IBM provided Hitler’s cannibalistic project with digitalization. ... It is considered that six million Jews were exterminated during the Holocaust. No better destiny awaited the Slavs, Russians and Belarusians in the east. According to the delusional theory of racial superiority that drove Hitler, the Slavs were supposed to be liberated of their territory for the lebensraum of the Germans. This did not happen thanks to the aptly organized resistance of the USSR and the victory in the Great Patriotic War – at the cost of enormous sacrifices. More Slavs lost their lives in the course of the battle even than Jews. All nationalities of the Soviet Union, which took the major blow in that grand battle, suffered enormous losses. The memory of her [the grand battle] will remain forever. And the interest in who worked for and fought on which side – who only for money and who only closed their eyes – the interest in all this will also be eternal.

First of all, Kiselëv can be viewed settling old scores with the cultural and religious Other of the Orthodox Church, Catholicism. By linking Pope Pius XII – no matter how disputed a historical figure – to Nationalist Socialism, Kiselëv labels the Catholic Church clearly with a stigma of the Other. Moving on, Kiselëv’s story establishes a connection between “Hitler’s Reich” and the United States, represented by the company of IBM and its former president, Thomas Watson. This practice can, in my estimation, be viewed to imply that the United States cooperated with the Wehrmacht during the Second World War. Thus, by a logical extension, the United States is reimagined as having fought the Soviet Union. Adding to the earlier findings regarding the practices of othering directed against the United States, Kiselëv thus adds another layer to the United States’ negative-otherness in contraposition to Russia. Due to this alleged affiliation with Nationalist Socialist Germany, the United States can thus be regarded as the ultimate Other of the current Russian nation.

Furthermore, the above quote illustrates a strong feeling of victimhood, in that Kiselëv states that the war claimed more Slavic lives than what the Holocaust claimed Jews – invoking the cyclical story of victimhood and the narrative of perfect Russian innocence. In connection to that, the finishing lines of the quote demonstrate Snyder’s notion of a politics of eternity in full action – for interest in the glorious victory and remembrance of the ‘Velikaja Otečestvennaja vojna’ will “be eternal”, as Kiselëv commands in conclusion.

## **5. Concluding discussion**

Now, let us pick up the red thread again and discuss our findings with reference to the research questions and the aims of this paper.

To begin with, the cultural roots of the Russian national idea were located in the era of tsar Nikolaj I, in form of Uvarov's triad of imperial statehood. Here, the double-sided coin of 'samoderžavie' and 'narodnost'', manifesting itself as the special bond between Russian ruler(s) and the population, was considered to be of central importance. Modern day echoes of this vertical dichotomy were found, firstly, in Putin's 'value' of 'gosudarstvenničestvo,' and in Surkov's imaginations on the devotion felt by the Russian people towards their head of state. Secondly, the narrative of a strong Russian ruler looking out for the best of his people got reproduced and amplified in Kiselëv's analytical news show *Vesti nedeli*. In connection to this, Kiselëv portrayed Putin as a strong leader attempting to drag the Russian nation out of a swamp of repression or, in other words, squeezing out 'little Stalin' of the national body. Little Stalin, symbolizing the repressive nature of Russian culture, can thus be viewed to function as a common denominator for the members of the imagined community of Russia and, further, as a constitutive element of a common Russian national identity.

What the remembrance of Stalinist horrors is concerned, the distinctive vocabulary of 'malen'kij Stalin', further, suggests a discursive practice of belittling in action. By presenting to his audience another major player on the ideological playground – 'big Stalin', the glorified victor in the Great Patriotic War – Kiselëv can be viewed to downplay the war that (little) Stalin waged on his own people. Moreover, Kiselëv thus proposes to his audience an utmost flexible, albeit contradictory, construct of a Russian national identity, for both little and big Stalin have their place in the story of a Russian nation. In my estimation, Kiselëv could thus even be regarded imposing a bipolar disorder on his audience.

Secondly, the horizontal dichotomy of the Russian idea – Russia's oftentimes-problematic relationship to its surroundings and, especially, the West – was found to feature prevalently in the current nation-building project. Again, Kiselëv's *Vesti nedeli* can be viewed to reproduce and spread the discourse spurred by Putin and Surkov, applying numerous discursive practices of othering against Western and Ukrainian Others. By means of comparison and value judgements, the Russian nation is thus defined as an antipode to these Others. Here, the narrative of Russia as a besieged fortress figured prominently. Especially Putin and Kiselëv can be viewed imagining Russia as a fortress of 'traditional', 'family', and heterosexual values, contrasting them with the 'non-traditional', 'abnormal', 'homosexual', and 'lesbian' values of the United States and Europe – values that are aggressively excluded from Russian national discourse. Further, it should be noted that the narrative of being surrounded by enemies flows strongly not only in official Russian rhetoric and Kiselëv's news show but, furthermore, is even perceived as real by the Russian

population, as the Levada-survey on the ‘Enemies of Russia’ indicates. Although one, given the context of state-propaganda, could ask questions regarding the emergence of such a perception, the fact remains that half of the Russian population considers being hampered by external enemies. What is more, the emergence of this perception and worldview is one with deep roots in Russian culture.

Regarding the hallmarks of the inter-discourse communication between the Russian state and Russia’s population, this study would, first, like to point to the specific bolševik vanguard mentality of the elite, manifesting itself as the will of Russian nation-builders – here: Kiselëv, Putin and Surkov – to impose their perceptions of ‘progress’ on the Russian population, a population oftentimes regarded as backward. Against this background, the Russian nation-building project can be described as a primarily top-down one, with communication going from the elites to the people.

Also, Russia’s particular view of and relationship to history was examined as hallmark of this inter-discourse communication, with the repeated references to the ‘Velikaja Otečestvennaja vojna’ marking a significant feature. Both Putin and especially Kiselëv can be viewed to instruct the population to go backwards in history with the aim of defining Russia’s place in the world of today. Thus, I would argue that the repeated references to ‘Hitler-Germany’, the great historic Other, and the active remembrance of the Soviet victory in the Second World War serve the purpose of defining Russian exceptionalism and, further, the purpose of cementing Russian innocence and righteousness. And much like with the story of cyclical Western aggression, the spectacle of victory over Hitler-fascism, which the domestic audience gets to relive over and over again on their TV-screens at home, becomes very much real. In connection to Holmström’s introductory definition of a narrative, I would thus argue that the Great Patriotic War provides the besieged fortress with a heroic past. Further, threat of cyclical and primarily Western otherness justifies, firstly, the present and, reaching beyond, presents a vision for the future.

The practice of making repeated references to past events could, on one hand, be viewed stemming from the ‘typically Russian’ practice of establishing parallels between distant periods of history and today’s day and age. On the other, this study also wishes to point to the roles that propaganda and the overarching system of political technology play in today’s nation-building project. For the domestic Russian information sphere can, against the findings of this study, be regarded as one where the Russian state has near-total control of all political discourse. Following up on that, one could put forward that the ‘ingrained mode of thinking characteristic of Russians’ view of their past,

present and future' might well have formed an alliance with the 'dark arts' of political technology. Moreover, it seems as if Russian state-propaganda has co-opted the cyclical paradigm of time, as well as certain symbols and narratives from Russian cultural history, in order to push its agenda. All means possible are mobilised in the fight for the greater good, i.e. the consolidation of the Russian state. Thus, the effect of language was viewed as being reduced to the mere effect, since all communication can be considered subordinate to the grand strategy of regime security. In reference to the CDA approach, the discursive practices employed in line with the top-down narration of the Russian national story can, thus and so, be viewed to serve as means of social and political domination.

## 6. Conclusion: Hypernormalisation?

Against the findings of this critical analysis, I would like to conclude this essay by a short reflection on how the Russian population could be viewed relating to the notion of state-propaganda. For many Russians are well aware that some of the news on state-TV, for example, is faked. According to a Levada-study on the Russian media landscape (2017), 56% of respondents assumed censorship to happen on the major state-TV channels.<sup>191</sup> But whereas 48% regarded censorship as necessary, only 37% indicated being categorically against censorship on state-TV. Further, the recipients are divided over whether or not they manage to distinguish true information from false: 46% indicated being able to do so and another 46% indicated they were not. Thus, almost half of the population can be regarded unable to distinguish between what is real and what is not.<sup>192</sup>

In connection to this, I would like to draw this essay to a close by putting forward an effect described by the Soviet anthropologist Jurčak (2006) – *hypernormalisation*.<sup>193</sup> The term originates in Jurčak's view of the Soviet experience of the 70s and 80s when the Soviet Union had, in words appropriated by Curtis, become

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<sup>191</sup> Cf. Volkov, D. & Gončarov, S. (2017, August 22). *Rossijskij medialandšaft: Osnovnye tendencii ispol'zovanija SMI – 2017*. In: Levada-centr. Retrieved 21. May 2019 from <http://www.levada.ru/2017/08/22/16440/>. Unfortunately, this is the most recent Levada-Center study I was able to locate featuring the above parameters. Nevertheless, I believe them to be able to set a general trend for the present analysis. Further, Bærug (2018) refers to the study in question as well, cf. Bærug (2018), pp. 25-26.

<sup>192</sup> For similar arguments, see also: Bærug (2018), pp. 25-26; Pomerantsev & Weiss (2014), p. 10.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Yurchak, A. (2006). *Everything was forever, until it was no more: The last Soviet generation* (Information series). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

a society where everyone knew that what their leaders said was not real because they could see it with their own eyes that the economy was falling apart. But everybody had to play along and pretend that it was real because no one could imagine any alternative. One Soviet writer [Jurčak] called it “hypernormalisation.” You were so much part of the system that it was impossible to see beyond it. The fakeness was hyper-normal.<sup>194</sup>

In today’s context, one could claim that even though a large part of the Russian population fully well knows that the state is feeding them with lies and propaganda, and that it might not be the homosexual West or Adolf Hitler who are to blame for Russia’s misfortunes, no one has the power to imagine any alternative to the Putinite system and, thus, the story of the Russian nation is caught in a loop. And where there is no alternative to the status quo, eternity looms.

Still, this paper wishes to end its reflections with a more hopeful prospect. Leaning on Trenin and on the findings of this study, one could argue that that it is within the Kremlin’s power to stop its informational-psychological operations targeting the domestic audience anytime it wants, “but the longer it continues, the more of a mark it will leave on Russian people’s minds.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Curtis (2016), 23:55-24:30; cf. Yurchak (2006); see also Kakutani (2018), p. 85.

<sup>195</sup> Trenin (2016), p. 91.

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