

Tiago Colombo Lazzari  
DISCOURSE AND MYTH IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA  
The Great Patriotic War and the Victory Day Narrative

University of Tampere  
School of Management  
International Relations - CBU  
Master's Thesis  
Supervisor: Heino Nyysönen  
July 2015

This research uses discourse analysis to investigate the importance of the Victory Day ritual and its symbolism in modern Russia. Commemorated on May 9, the Victory Day marks the end of the Second World War, which entered in the history of the Soviet Union as the Great Patriotic War. This version of the conflict not only emphasises the suffering and heroism of the Soviet people, but also presents the Victory over the enemy as an essential element of its narrative. Given its dimensions, this account became a central aspect of the country's post-war identity. The Russian Federation, as the official successor of the Soviet Union, adopted the Victory Day as one of its most important holidays, in particular since the rise of Vladimir Putin to power in 2000. The main postulate of this research is that the Great Patriotic War and the Victory were elevated to a mythical status in Putin's Russia. From my theoretical perspective, myths are the ultimate carriers of symbolism within a community, and therefore bear authority to regulate its social practices. Historical myths present a double-structure: a temporal one, related to the past event, and an atemporal one, whose importance is ever-present in its community as an authoritative account. In Russia, the War/Victory myth functions as a mediator between two discursive practices: that of the country's national identity and that of its political leadership.

In analysing these three layers of discourse (the national identity, the ritual, and the political leadership), this research aims at understanding how the ritual has been raised to this mythical status, and how it operates in connecting the country's elite with its population. As such, four questions are considered: *"how has the discourse on the Great Patriotic War/the Victory, and in particular its relevance, evolved from 2000-2015? Which are the underlying and explicit elements (practices) structuring this discourse (what is the myth)? How do these elements relates to the meanings present in the 'national' and the 'political' levels of discourse? How do they interact with concrete political circumstances?"* In order to answer these questions, this research departs from the poststructuralist perspective of the Essex School of discourse analysis, as proposed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. By regarding political struggle as a competition for the hegemony of a society's discursive field, this school focuses on how meanings are articulated in this process. As such, this research systematically analyses two annual speeches delivered by the Russian head of state during the Victory Day commemoration. Moreover, it relates these official statements to Russia's political context of the fifteen years analysed.

This study concludes that the mythical narrative gained prominence as its concrete external references became increasingly replaced by elements emphasising the importance of the narrative itself. This process took place on the course of the period analysed, as Russia's social and political questions became increasingly associated to the mythical narrative embodied during the 9 May ritual.

Key Words: Russia, Russian Federation, Great Patriotic War, Victory Day, 9 May, Putin, Myth, World War II, Discourse Analysis, Discursive Order, Essex School, Poststructuralism, Semiotics

## Table of Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Research questions .....	4
<b>2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 The study of meaning: from Semiotics to Discourse Analysis.....	7
2.1.1 Semiotics .....	8
2.1.2 Postmodernism and Discourse Analysis.....	11
2.1.3 Laclau and the Essex School of Discourse Analysis.....	15
2.3.3 History, memory and myth .....	17
2.4 Perceptions of meaning and discourse .....	25
<b>3. DISCOURSE AND MEANING IN OPERATION: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1 Exploring the Essex school of discourse analysis .....	28
3.2 Discourse analysis in practice.....	32
3.2.1 Assessing the data .....	35
3.2.2 Processing the data .....	37
3.3 Final considerations in bridging the theoretical-empirical gap.....	38
<b>4. VERIFYING MYTHICAL DISCOURSES: THE RUSSIAN CASE.....</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1 The Victory Day ritual in the Soviet Union.....	41
4.2 The Victory narrative amid the discursive turmoil of the 1990s.....	43
4.3 Presidential Speeches and the Victory Day ritual after Yeltsin .....	49
4.3.1 Putin’s first term (2000-2003).....	51
4.3.1 Putin’s second term (2004-2007).....	63
4.3.3 Medvedev’s interim (2008-2012).....	75
4.3.4 Putin’s third term (2012-2015) .....	89
<b>5. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>104</b>
5. 1 Final considerations .....	104
5.2 Research limitations and further studies.....	108
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>111</b>
Primary sources .....	111
Secondary sources .....	113

## List of Abbreviations

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation
DA	Discourse Analysis
EU	European Union
GPW	Great Patriotic War
LDPR	Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
RF	Russian Federation
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SP	Speech at the Parade
SR	Speech at the Reception
UN	United Nations
USA/US	Unites States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VD	Victory Day
WWII	Second World War

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview

By any account, the Second World War (WWII) was the bloodiest event of the twentieth century, leaving behind it destruction on a massive scale and impacting the demographics and economics of the Eurasian continent for decades. Even more important, however, was the enormous social, political and psychological consequences that the conflict engendered. Arguably, the trauma of the conflict gave European societies a heightened sense of respect for human rights and individual well-being, as well as an irresistible urge to take any measure available in order to guarantee harmonic relations between countries. In Western Europe, it inspired what later became the European Union (EU); on a global level, it gave birth to the United Nations (UN) and the promotion of universal values based on solidarity and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

In Eastern Europe, a political element was at the forefront of the conflict's significance. Whereas to socialist societies the aftermath of the war generated an aspiration for peaceful coexistence between nations and (an alternative version of) social and material progress, the fact that fascism was destroyed became the most prominent element of the post-war order. To some extent, this was politically promoted by the socialist regimes, in which antifascism became a "major symbol" of these societies (Wydra 2007:152). For the Soviet Union (USSR), the impacts of the conflict on the society were particularly severe. The conflict with Nazi Germany inflicted the loss of more than 20 million lives in the course of four years (1941-1944); under Joseph Stalin, the degree of social mobilization it entailed reached unprecedented levels. During what was called the Great Patriotic War (GPW)<sup>1</sup>, the official propaganda prompted all of its citizens to defend the Soviet nation (see Gill 2010). In the aftermath, the Soviet Union emerged as one of the victorious sides; accordingly, the Victory materialized as the antithesis to the suffering it had created.

The conflict and its memory remained a central element in the Soviet society up until its collapse, when its narrative underwent destabilization, along with the regime's entire symbolic system; nonetheless, in the last decades, this commemoration experienced a revival in Russia's national identity. The 9 May holiday marks the Victory Day (VD) commemoration, with its name underlining the fortunate outcome of the conflict as its main element. In view of the absence of other truly national experiences evoking positive images, its popularity in the country remains uncontested (Toshchenko 2010). The War<sup>2</sup> ritual became a symbol of unity and source of inspiration for the present generations,

---

<sup>1</sup> Some researchers also call it the "Great Fatherland War", which is actually a more accurate translation of the adjective *otechestvennoe*; nevertheless, the term Great Patriotic War (GPW) is by far the most accepted.

<sup>2</sup> "[...] in the Soviet Union or Russia, when people say 'the War', they always mean one war, *the* war: the Great Patriotic War" (Gudkov 2005). For a matter of compactness, I will follow the same practice, and refer to it either as "the War"

a decisive event with strong implications for the country's social and political *ethos*. It is not to be conceived as something in opposition to historical facts, but rather as a remembrance practice that gathers such a momentum as to seize these facts for its own right and pose a decisive influence in daily lives. Therefore, its meaning in the present cannot be studied by historical methods, but rather by those of political science (Nyysönen 2008).

Since the beginning, the GPW and VD have been portrayed together.<sup>3</sup> As two aspects mutually reinforcing a common narrative, they depart from the more comprehensive (and more “neutral”) WWII. After seven decades, it retains its “chief symbolic elements”: “collective suffering, sacrifice and salvation [and] the victory achieved due to the unity of [the communist] party and people” (Gill 2010:276). In our time, the party has long been gone, but the union between the people (nation) and its political leadership is still an important aspect of this narrative. Accordingly, my study concerns this relationship, not only in regards to the GPW/VD symbolism itself, but in the wider symbolic space of Russia, with its social, political and cultural developments. For that, I use the theoretical framework provided by discourse analysis. Discourses can be understood as systems of meanings or representations. These systems shape how both individuals and their abstract collective identities, such as nations, make sense of the world around them, how they interpret it and, consequently, how they behave. Effectively, “reality”<sup>4</sup> is constructed, directly or indirectly, through discourses. Identity and identification play a crucial role in defining what is self-evident and what is below the threshold of perception in a community. Many aspects of our daily existence become “naturalized” through these discursive practices, and what is taken to be common sense often conceals what Barthes (1972:10) calls an “ideological abuse [...] the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying”. The objective of discourse analysis is to deconstruct these assumptions in order to provide new perspectives on the phenomena it studies, and I introduce it in more detail in chapter two.

Discourses, or rather discursive fields, potentially have infinite levels, or layers, of articulations. These layers co-exist and interact. Whereas many studies deal with one instance of discourse, this research aims at clarifying the interaction between the Russian national “identity”, the GPW/VD narrative, and the political leadership of the country. In order to do so, I defined three levels of discourse, which I will proceed to explain.

---

or as “GPW”. However, there is an important caveat: War and GPW means the specific narrative practice adopted in modern Russia, which I will explore in detail below. Therefore, if I refer to the wider scenario of the global conflict, I will call it Second World War or World War II (WWII).

<sup>3</sup> For conciseness, I often abbreviate these terms, and present them together (GPW/VD) when assessing the myth as such.

<sup>4</sup> Unless complemented by an adjective, I will always refer to “reality” either in the plural or between inverted commas, lest/to avoid that this concept (may) become deceptively concrete/straightforward. It will become clear as I elaborate on the theoretical aspects of this work.

Our first level of analysis (“the nation”) encompasses the discursive field in its entirety. It is the horizon of possibilities, something potentially infinite. It is not a “thing” as such, and does not perform an active role, but it is rather the background where everything else takes place. Ultimately, it is “reality” itself. As such, it is impossible to be fully explored, and can only be approached as a reification. Thus, we deal with specific realities. The reality of this work is the “Russian reality” in its broadest sense—the zeitgeist that is embodied by the Russian national identity and the “collective imaginary” of its society. I also refer to it as the “wider symbolic (discursive) order”. However arbitrary, this level of discourse must have a perceivable form in order to contextualize this work. Its structure is based on self-definitions, featuring a discernible core representing the less disputed acceptions (“meanings”) of “Russia/Russian”. I will centre my research on this core idea. Since it has no definitive borders, its conventionality gives way to systematic reinterpretation as we move our focus away from this centre—up to the point where the infinite, shapeless horizon of possibility again prevents the feasibility of “reality”.

By contrast, our second discursive level (“the leadership”) is a structure operating within the limits of the first. It is the prevailing political paradigm, or simply the “political”. It means the group in power. For the period analysed, I also refer to it as elite, authorities, Putin, the government, or Putin-Medvedev (although not Medvedev alone). It can also refer to Yeltsin (during the 1990s) or the communist party and any of its general secretaries (during the USSR). In my methodological approach, it denotes the political discourse struggling for hegemony in the discursive field. It does so by capturing the “meanings” that are dispersed throughout this field, and articulating them on chains of representations. Political success (or failure thereof) is defined by the ability of a specific political discourse to be in conformity with the wider symbolic order. The closer it resembles the core of the wider discursive field, the more successful it is. It has agency, and its practices are not simply pursuing the core, but also bringing elements closer to it, or moving them away from it. As such, the interaction between these two levels is multidirectional.

Mediating this leadership-nation nexus is the Victory Day and its symbolism (“the myth”), the topic of this research. It is not the only mediator possible; a multitude of instances of interaction between a country’s leadership and its “nation” exist. Nonetheless, my research works with the hypothesis that the Great Patriotic War and the Victory<sup>5</sup> acquired the status of a *mythical* narrative through the ritual of commemoration. Accordingly, this narrative establishes the paradigm governing the country’s social relations, and—if the political articulation is successful—it brings the leadership and the nation

---

<sup>5</sup> When referring to its particular representation in the VD symbolic order, Victory will always be capitalized. In fact, the transcripts of the material I analyse also present “Victory” capitalised, even though they are instances of verbal communication.

closer to each other. This occurs when the myth incorporates both the meanings (signifiers) existing in the symbolic order and those of the leadership. While, on one hand, this type of holiday represents the “official self-understanding” of the political leadership (Nyysönen 2008:1690), it is also true that, as long as it stands in conformity with the wider discursive order, it represents the nation’s self-understanding as well. For this to occur, we must understand where the “meanings” are located on the level of the “nation” and on the level of the “leadership”, and how the mythical narrative connects the two systems of meanings throughout time.

As I explain in chapter three, my methodological operation consists in analysing the annual Speeches<sup>6</sup> delivered by the head of state on 9 May, marking the commemoration. Since the two other levels of discourse are in motion, I explore the social and political context in which the ritual takes place to account for the situation of the “nation” and the “leadership”. In order to be able to infer general trends in this interaction, I decided to systematically evaluate a period of fifteen years (2000-2015) of the Victory Day). This period corresponds to what is sometimes called “Putin’s Russia”. Indeed, the leader left a distinctive mark in the order that emerged after Yeltsin, and his persona is reflected in all of the discursive levels highlighted in this research. Accordingly, I define the hiatus between his presidencies—when Medvedev replaced him as the head of state—as an “interim”. This analysis takes place in chapter four. It starts with an introduction of the Victory Day ritual from the end of the War until the period covered in the study, and then proceeds to the analysis of the annual Speeches as such.<sup>7</sup>

In the last section, chapter five, I present the main conclusions of the research.

## 1.2 Research questions

As already suggested, my central argument is that the Victory Day constitutes a *myth* in modern Russian society—in fact, it is a fundamental myth. There are several attributes that define a mythical narrative. While I will discuss the topic in chapter three, it is useful to outline some of the basic elements constituting a myth. Generally speaking, holidays like the one on 9 May consist of a past event that does not exist anymore, but its experience “continues and is open to new interpretations and representations”—on that account, it is a “mediated experience” (Nyysönen 2008:138). On the

---

<sup>6</sup> As with the other cases mentioned, “Speeches” with a capital “S” refers specifically to the material used.

<sup>7</sup> To keep the accuracy, I used the verbatim transcripts (in Russian). When transliterating, I generally follow the norms of the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN); a simple guide is available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BGN/PCGN\\_romanization\\_of\\_Russian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BGN/PCGN_romanization_of_Russian). The general exception are the letter *ě*, which I usually Romanize as *yo*; the endings *-iy* and *-yy*, simplified to *-i* and *-y*; and **names** already popularized in the English language with a different spelling.



other hand, one of the basic factors that differentiate a myth from other historical events is that it exists in the realm of the “pre-political”, or even apolitical, and its truth “is not subject to contestation or challenge” (Sakwa 2008:204). As such, it can be regarded as one step beyond history, and not as something different in nature. Furthermore, it poses an undeniable authoritative value, to the extent that its narrative helps one to understand present-time experiences. Its truthfulness does not lie in its factuality, but rather in its significance. As something accepted as living in the present, it shapes current social practices by the mere fact that it exists. It has, thus, a dual-dimension: a temporal one—the event-as-such—and an atemporal one—the timeless authority that decisively determines existence in any circumstance in which it is evoked. These two aspects result in a contradiction, inasmuch as its community assumes the myth is not really existing in the present (it is “untrue”), at the same time that it “provid[es] a dramatic representation of the deeper truths that underlie social relations and the relations of a political community to fate and destiny” (idem. 203). To a degree, it is a heroic narrative that is too epic to be fully understood. A certain aura of religious mysticism surrounds it, as it “is” and “is not” existing simultaneously. As already postulated, the GPW/VD myth operates by mediating the national and the political, the symbolic order and the discursive practice each competing for dominance. In addition to this, some questions might help with understanding how the myth affects these two levels (i.e. how it keeps them together):

*How has the discourse on the Great Patriotic War/the Victory, and in particular its relevance, evolved from 2000-2015?*

*Which are the underlying and explicit elements (practices) structuring this discourse (what is the myth)?*

*How do these elements relate to the meanings present in the “national” and the “political” levels of discourse? How do they interact with concrete political circumstances?*

Therefore, the basic task of verifying to which extent the GPW/VD qualifies as a myth takes the form of analysing the national and the political identities and their respective structures of meaning (articulations). At the same time, it is necessary to clarify the role that the mythical narrative performs in respect to these articulations. It is possible to speculate, from the outset, that these must be represented in the myth for it to qualify as such. Accordingly, the country’s “national issues” must be filtered through the myth; if the political discourse is to reach (and maintain) a hegemonic status, it must answer to the national “question(s)”, aspirations, and concerns that the myth entails. In a tridimensional plane, the myth and the hegemonic discourse are fully operative at the moment that

they are aligned with the core of the discursive field; as already mentioned, if the “political” is not aligned with these two, it will not be successful in achieving and/or keeping its dominance; on the other hand, if the “political” can adjust to the symbolic order without resorting to the ritual, the ritual has not reached the authority that confers to it a mythical status.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter exposes the theoretical background that bases this work. In order to do so, I present the developments on the disciplines concerned with the study of meanings, starting from semiotics all the way to discourse analysis and my specific orientation within this field. In order to bring the theoretical framework of this work closer to its concrete historical object, I then proceed to present a brief discussion on the study of the past, its social role as historical memory narrative, which are specific instances of meaning and representation. As such, I discuss the concept of myth, a specific category of discourse that may be useful to apply in the case of the Great Patriotic War and the Victory. The chapter ends with a brief discussion on the content presented, connecting it to the practicalities of this research project.

### 2.1 The study of meaning: from Semiotics to Discourse Analysis

The basic object of analysis of this work is discourse, a rather loose umbrella term for the perspectives that govern our daily practices. Discourse is a specific structure that systematically organize a set of meanings, at the same time that it represents a meaning by itself. As I will reason throughout this chapter, meaning is very problematic concept. At the same time that meanings are perceived and created all the time, there are no limits to the cognitive framework behind these processes, which can lead to an infinite regression—how can one define what meaning *means*?

In practical terms, the concept is not less unambiguous. Ultimately, something can only exist as long as it transmits meaning; even when we talk about a “meaningless” situation, we are simply implying that it does not have the suitable—or expected—meaning. At the same time, if something only exists through the way it is perceived, the entirety of what we call “reality” can be approached as a *system of representations*, at the same time symbolizing and constructing this reality (Chandler 2007:11,70). This perspective lies beyond semiotics, the discipline that is at the starting point of my theoretical explanation.

It ranges from the most implicit and contextual assumptions to clear manifestations of orientations and ideas. Whereas most analysis on political strife, and of political and social sciences as a whole, tend to underscore the latter, this work aims at uncovering underlying features of the contemporary Russian discourse on the Great Patriotic War, as already mentioned.

Semiotics studies signs, which draws our attention to the role of representation and perception in defining things—in assigning them meaning. Nevertheless, meaning can be analysed further, and I proceed then to investigate its practical impact in social studies, through the emergence of a synthetic

approach to social sciences through what is considered postmodern approaches to “reality”, as well as on its methodological offspring of discourse analysis. In this discipline, meaning becomes the most important object analysis in human activity.

The mapping of the development of our theoretical and methodological perspective finally culminates with a brief presentation of our analytical tools provided by the Essex School of discourse analysis, which I examine in more detail in the following chapter.

Finally, I provide a critical assessment of the topics discussed in an attempt to further connect the material presented and to clarify the practical implications the theoretical framework of this study.

### *2.1.1 Semiotics*

Semiotics is the basic discipline that deals with meanings and their interpretation. According to Umberto Eco, “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign” (1976:7). Since a sign is a representation of something (i.e. it *means*), every meaning can be represented through signs, including social phenomena. Similarly, there is no sign without meaning.

The inception of semiotics tend to be located in the works of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the philosopher Charles Peirce. The centrality of language in semiotics comes from it being a more established discipline than the study of other sign-systems (Chandler 2007:5). I shall focus on the Saussurean interpretation of the field, as its implications are more fruitful in what concerns my theoretical stance. According to Chandler (*idem.* 15), Saussure divided the signs into two aspects: the *signifier* and the *signified*. The first one represents the mean that convey the meaning, for example the word “dog”, whereas the latter deals with the “meaning itself”. In this example, the signified would be the mental image the interlocutors have when hearing the word dog. It is important to bear in mind that in Saussurean semiotics the signified is a concept in the mind, not a thing but a notion of a thing (*idem.* 16). Outside semiotics, the combination of these aspects in a “closed” sign can be considered the dog itself, but this evokes a metaphysical debate with endless ramifications. This study is grounded on the (‘radical’) philosophic perspective that any kind of essential quality in a sign—or in anything else, for that matter—is a fiction, since they are never completely closed.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, semiotics analyses the relation between a given medium to convey a meaning—such as a written word—and the theoretically objective meaning of something, a dualism in the sign sometimes related to that of *form* and *content*<sup>9</sup> (*idem.* 55).

---

<sup>8</sup> This is a key aspect of ‘postmodern’ approaches to reality, which I explore in more detail below.

<sup>9</sup> Once again, the content of a sign is not to be confused with its ‘essence’.

This “breaking down” of meaning questions its existence as a stable, definite entity. As such, it drives our attention to its relational character, in the sense that each sign can only be defined in relation to other signs, instead of referring to an essential nature (idem. 18). Whereas Saussure defines each individual sign as *parole*, he defines the wider set of rules and conventions as *langue*. Since the latter would precede and be independent of the former in this conception, “the distinction is one between *system* and *usage*, *structure* and *event*.” (idem. 8, italics in the original). Accordingly, one can say that the “*identity* of any element is a product of the *differences* and *oppositions* established by the elements of the linguistic system” (Howarth 2000:22, italics in original). The emphasis on *langue* denotes a structuralist perspective, where “apparently unrelated and inexplicable events or processes can be made intelligible by reference to a formal system of relationships” (idem. 17). This formal system of relationships in semiotics is referred to as *sign-system*—i.e. a system of representations.

Another central implication of the semiotic approach in the Saussurean perspective is the *arbitrariness* of signs. If signs can only be defined in relational terms, lacking a strictly independent quality, there is no systematic logic behind their formulation and, in principle, any signifier could represent any signified: “there is nothing ‘treeish’ about the word ‘tree’” (Chandler 2007:22-23). “Reality” is thus seen as a seamless continuum, and Chandler (idem. 24) rhetorically asks: “where does a corner end?”. In that case, signs are about an effort to delimitate<sup>10</sup> an object, be it material or not. This is mostly an unconscious process, and for that reason not readily identifiable. Consequently, it is more apparent in strange linguistic codes than in one's own native code, since it takes a certain level of detachment from it for this arbitrariness to be perceived as such.

In a similar vein, arbitrariness is more recognizable in *marked* than in *unmarked* signs. As conceptualized by the linguist Roman Jakobson, unmarked signs are those considered “natural”, generic terms, while the marked ones are specific stances of the former, providing precise, additional information. For instance, when the word “man” is used to mean any individual, rather than being gender specific. In this example, woman is a marked sign of man—a background word representing any human (idem. 94-96). Other examples of marked/unmarked correlations include unhappy/happy, bitch/dog<sup>11</sup>, inconsistent/consistent, holiday/working day. The important to note here is that the unmarked term serves as a background term whose neutrality is usually taken for granted, while the marked term means particular, noteworthy attributes. This categorization is also specific to its sign-system, as in the case of the terms “bourgeois” or “capitalist”, which are marked in left-wing discourses—conversely, the absence of these terms in right-wing discourses does not mean that they

---

<sup>10</sup> Or *define*, but delimitate gives a stronger emphasis of the spatial aspect of “limiting” a meaning.

<sup>11</sup> On an interesting side note, in the Russian language many species have the *female* as the neutral, generic term, such as in лошадь (mare) for horse and собака (bitch) for dog.

do not exist, but rather that they are *implied* (i.e. unmarked). Since the unmarked form is the dominant one, it becomes transparent, drawing no attention to its privileged status (idem. 96).

This theoretical conceptualization leads to fruitful developments in social sciences. One of the most direct associations between semiotics and social activity is present in Yuri Lotman's *Theory of Culture* (1990). While understanding culture as the whole sphere of social meaning, thus encompassing areas such as politics and economics, this author takes a sceptic stance towards the capacity of an observer to perceive it objectively and independently, without representations:

[...] it [science] has moved away from the view according to which the scientist looked at reality 'from the position of truth', into the world of relativity. [...] science as it was shaped after Renaissance, based on the ideas of Descartes and Newton, assumed that the scientist was an external observer looking at his object from outside and therefore enjoying absolute 'objective' knowledge. Modern science from nuclear physics to linguistics sees the scientist as inside the world being described and as a part of that world. (Lotman 1990:269)

However, most practical stances of "pure" semiotic analysis kept its linguistic orientation, mostly developing in the field of literature and language studies<sup>12</sup>. One of the first substantial attempts to apply the semiotic approach to the social sciences was made by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's, who "[extended] Saussure's linguistic model to wider sets of social relationships and practices [...] [where] society itself can be understood as a symbolic system" (Howarth: 2000:27). In studying the symbolic meanings in societies provided by myths and even by material objects—such as totems in Native American<sup>13</sup> tribes), the anthropologist focused on "the set of signs and codes that make possible different social practices" (idem. 27).

Despite initial attempts to extend Saussure's approach to social sciences, these efforts took a qualitative leap with Jacques Derrida's critical *deconstruction* of the Saussurean perspective. Derrida's procedure applied to any discourse, and consisted of firstly reading them in the most faithful manner, according to the mainstream code of its author; then, to "deconstruct" the arguments as to reach the underlying logics of this discourse (idem. 44). This deconstruction is seen as legitimate as the original reading. Therefore, one of the main targets of Derrida's criticism is what he saw as a privileging of the signified over the signifier in Saussure's work, and of the spoken language over the written one. Derrida framed this privileged status within a more general, conceptual opposition of spirit and matter, mind and body, thought and substance. This dualism, as originally formalized by

---

<sup>12</sup> In this sort of analysis, categorizations such as the 'level of arbitrariness' of signs, their 'modality' and 'digital and analogue' aspects, 'codes', 'alignment' of opposites meanings, 'intertextuality', 'paradigmatic and syntagmatic' dimensions, provide several tools for semiotic analysis. For a comprehensive, if not exhaustive, approach on the field of semiotics (in linguistics), see Chandler (2007).

<sup>13</sup> As an illustrative example of what was mentioned previously, the term 'Native' is a marked one, an attribute to differentiate 'Native Americans' from what our mainstream culture considers to be '(the standard) Americans'. The absent term 'standard' might as well be replaced by 'neutral' or even 'true' in an unmarked term like this one.

René Descartes, still is one of the main tenets of the modern Western metaphysical perspective, which according to Derrida subordinates material forms to less material ones (Chandler 2007:99-100). Under this perspective, written language would be a mediation of second order, less important than and even corrupting the “pure” form of “speech-thought” (Howarth 2000:36). A clear manifestation of the perspective of written language as an artificial and auxiliary aspect of existence is its categorical role in the division between human “prehistory” and “history”.

In Saussurean semiotics, this leads up to a system consisting of a closed, “self-contained dyad”. As Howarth (idem. 30) puts it: “Saussure stresses that elements in a language are relational and thus dependent on one another for their meaning” adding that the “overall linguistic system” is complete, thus giving birth to a “new form of structuralist essentialism”. In this sense, language is “a *product*, rather than a *process of production*.” (italics in the original). By contrast, Derrida’s stance portrays hierarchical dichotomies as misleading, inasmuch as the second term in them is not only a result, but also a constitutive part of the first term. This does not refute, but rather radicalizes Saussure’s approach to binary orders. Howarth (idem 42) posits that “instead of presence *or* absence, Derrida emphasizes the *mutual imbrication* of presence and absence. [...] each repetition or moment of inscription is necessarily subject to the distorting effects of context, and thus there is no fully closed system of language” (my italics).

This novel outlook, based on an open system in which meanings and “anti-meanings” are mutually constitutive, opened a wide range of interpretative possibilities of signs and meanings. On the semiotic discipline, this represented the emergence of the poststructuralist approach in the 1960s, amid the emergence of postmodernism in social disciplines. The system moved from being the ultimate constraint of a sign to having its own stability put into question. In this context, the subjective interaction between single events and their underlying structures became a central point in the academic debate, categorically placing “reality” under the perspective of subjectivity.

In privileging the role of the subjective construction of meanings in interpreting socio-political realities, postmodernism represented a watershed in the study of social sciences. The interaction between signifiers and signifieds became a tool for analysing not only linguistic systems, but also social symbols and practices. At the same time, it stimulated critical perspectives to the forefront of social analysis, and topics such as culture, identity and meaning provided a prolific field for disciplines such as discourse analysis to develop.

### *2.1.2 Postmodernism and Discourse Analysis*

In what can be considered a paradigmatic shift, postmodernism also proposed novel points of dialogue

between different areas of knowledge, synthesizing traditionally different disciplines. By traditionally, I refer to the positivist paradigm that dominated the epistemic community for the most part of the nineteenth century up until the Second World War, which assumed that “reality” could be analytically broken down into single, discrete and unproblematic units, or “areas of knowledge”. Conversely, postmodernism assumes that each discipline brings forth its own reality. Consequently, and a merging of parallel realities becomes a method to stimulate new perspectives, hence new realities. In the social sciences, Marxist, psychoanalytical, feminist and “green”—to name but a few—interpretations of social reality were coupled with semiotics to explore the logics behind social discourses, giving shape to the wide field of discourse analysis. Paradoxically, at the same time that the contribution of the semiotic conceptual background to this area of social sciences became widely acknowledged, the discipline itself was mostly kept within its traditional domain of linguistics and literary criticism—in fact, political and social analysts rely considerably on semiotics, but their activity is rarely called by this name.

To put it concisely, the “linguistic turn” taking place amid postmodernism between the 1960s and 1980s<sup>14</sup> can be considered “a sea-change in academic discourse [...] rhetorical forms are deeply and unavoidably involved in the shaping of realities. Form and content are inseparable. Language is not a neutral medium and our choice of words matters” (Chandler 2007:123). As a developed movement in philosophy and literary criticism, it became known as poststructuralism.

The incorporation of meaning to the centrality of social studies puts the objective appreciation of empirical data into question. The emphasis shifts from the positivist intention of establishing mechanical explanation to a more subjective inspiration in “understanding” through participative and reflexive observation—the agent of science becomes itself a subject of it. While this review focus on the impact of postmodernism and poststructuralism in the academy, its repercussions are much more far-reaching, and what can be considered its “extreme agnosticism” deconstructed notions such as art, moral and even truth. It put into question previous beliefs that big theories and ideologies could serve as stable, unproblematic grounds for the scientific measuring—what Lyotard (1984) defines as the scepticism on *metanarratives*, which is sometimes referred to as “totalizing discourses”. Epistemologically, science takes a turn toward social studies in the sense that there are no “objective” manners to assess the truthfulness of a scientific postulate, only to its *performative* character (i.e. usefulness) in its specific context (idem. italics in the original). In a radical interpretation, science is no more a specific way of organizing, accumulating and distributing certain pieces of information. As such, the scientific world meets the political world.

---

<sup>14</sup> The student unrest in May 1968 in France is considered an inflexion point in the “aesthetics” of postmodernism.



With this philosophic-cultural background, discourse analysis emerges as a linguistic perspective on social sciences. Interpreting social and political practices as “texts”, something already present in Derrida’s deconstruction, discourse analysis shares the postmodern<sup>15</sup> epistemological agnosticism and understands its own activity as an arbitrary endeavour: in deciphering social events from specific standpoints, it readily acknowledges its attempt to present a static picture of a phenomenon that is in constant flux. Therefore, research based on discourse analysis is limited by its contingency, at the same time that—paradoxically—it cannot be done without recognizing this fleeting feature.

One of the main proponents of the discourse analysis and the poststructuralist approach as a whole was Michel Foucault. From the beginning, his social studies dealt with “subtler” aspects of socio-political existence through what he called the archaeological method, literally laying bare the hidden assumptions of social life. His best-known contribution to the social sciences is the investigation of power relations behind social practices (Chandler 2007:218). His analysis mainly dealt with unveiling how conventions and general assumptions in social practices managed to sanction and repress certain kinds of behaviour through “discourses” embedded with a strong, albeit not readily perceived, normative character. Foucault aimed at making these discourses identifiable and understandable, exploring the set of meanings behind discourses used to legitimize social and power relations in the socio-political interaction. In doing so, these discourses reveal themselves as instruments of power. For instance, attempts by the state to control the individual’s relation to its body—notably by limiting sexual behaviours to what it sees more useful to its ends—gave birth to the foucauldian concept of “bio-power” (Howarth 2000:75-77).

One of his first acknowledged studies dealt with the concept of scientific truth. In line with the postmodern stance of ‘truth’ as part of wider social, cultural and political processes, rather than a neutral standpoint for observation, Foucault highlighted its contingent nature: a “provisory knowledge” established as truth, allied with the power relations supporting its assertions (idem. 77-79). Other of his works aim at contextualizing established customs and the unequal practices of society, including the investigation of the clinical procedures carried out by doctors, the definitions of madness and sanity throughout time, the penal system and sexuality. In unveiling the exclusory practices behind the occurrence of these ‘subgroups’ (the criminal, the insane, the homosexual), he detects a normative discourse motivated primarily by conscious intentions and executed through relations of power in society.

Notwithstanding its novel approach, Foucault still kept the dichotomy between “discursive” and “non-discursive” practices, which in Essex School evolves to the radical stance of everything as

---

<sup>15</sup> In many cases like this, the terms “postmodernism” and “poststructuralism” are largely interchangeable.

conveying and producing meaning (Laclau & Mouffe 1985:107). In this perspective, discourses themselves have material existence, and there is no “extra-discursive” meaning in social practices (Howarth 2000:104).

The field of psychoanalyses proved to be very fruitful to the study of discourse analysis. The most remarkable case is Jacques Lacan’s theories on identity formation of individuals, being applied to political science by philosophers such as Louis Althusser, Michel Pêcheux and, more recently, Slavoj Žižek. Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage, the moment when a child for the first time recognizes, or rather identifies with, her<sup>16</sup> image in the mirror, is described by Pêcheux as a period when “the individual brings itself into existence by *identifying* with an external object” (*apud* Howarth 2000:95. Italics in the original). This original identification is unconscious, and constitutes what was up until then was a potential individual. It guides all subsequent identifications throughout an individual’s life, although this connection is not readily perceived—as the deep, original identification appears as self-evident and obvious to its subject (Pêcheux *apud* Howarth 2000:96). Similarly, these identifications create the sense of ‘otherness’ and a big ‘Other’, the external referential point par excellence, which stimulates at the same time a desire to copy (learn) and a latent anxiety arising from the inevitable feeling of alienation in relation to it—therefore, the process goes both ways, as *intersubjectivity*. Whereas in Lacanian analysis this big Other is the child’s mother, in social sciences this process of unconscious intersubjective identification is used to define specific perspectives of social groups (parties, factions, countries) between “us” and “them” (i.e. “not-us”), and how this shapes their practices and policies. To make a parallel with my study, it is often argued that Russia’s big Other is “the West”.

Finally, Lacan’s concept of *lack* has profound implications in social analysis, particularly in Laclau’s discourse analysis, the methodology used in this work. While poststructuralist semiotics already considers signs an “empty” (i.e. arbitrary) construction, this concept clarifies the implications of this perspective. On that account, Posner (2011:22) argues that ultimately the individual only exists at those points where we would otherwise encounter a gap in the chain of signifiers: the concept of the subject, thus, serves merely as a gap-filler, as a representation of its emptiness. If this “essential lack” is the characteristic of any identity, it also lies at the heart of individual and collective struggle/strife, as conflicts emerge from conflicting identities. I now move to explore Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of discourse analysis, which brought this factor to the centrality of social and political studies.

---

<sup>16</sup> Or “his”, which would not draw much attention as it is the common sign in the code used (i.e. the unmarked sign).

### 2.1.3 Laclau and the Essex School of Discourse Analysis

A systematic approach to discourse analysis, both in its theoretical assumptions and in its methodological procedure, was developed in the late 1980s by the political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Accordingly, this method is often called “Laclau’s theory of discourse analysis”; as a developed discipline, it is also labelled “Essex school” of discourse analysis, named after the university where the theoreticians developed most of their work.<sup>17</sup> I will present it in more detail in the next chapter; however, some general outlines and additional background information will be useful in locating it in the academic debate.

Departing from Marx’s theoretical and analytical framework, the theoreticians nonetheless take issue with Marxist approaches to society and ideology—hence their self-definition as “post-Marxists”. In the classical Marxist conception, economic logics determines most, if not all, social experience<sup>18</sup> (Howarth 2000:100). Besides, the class in power of the means of economic production dominates society, having clear interests in keeping the *status quo*. Under this framework, ideology is simply an abstract set of ideas divorced from the material world, an artificial tool—Marx calls it “false consciousness”—to serve the interests of the ruling class (Howarth 2000:92,98). The authors reject this perspective, incorporating Gramsci’s reflections on Marxism in order to problematize society and ideology as objective practices. Gramsci presents society an entity that consists of groups building agreements and articulating sociocultural practices, mainly through established institutions (the educational system, church), to obtain legitimacy and consent with the intention of becoming dominant, i.e. hegemonic—hence Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. This process occurs within civil society, along with the traditional coercive relations based on political and economic inequalities, which he calls political society (idem. 90-92). In this sense, ideology is an organic, “neutral<sup>19</sup>” influence mediated by social and cultural practices; in its hegemonic form, it supports the constituted order. In Gramsci, subjectivity enters the political sphere: through moral and intellectual considerations instilled by dominant social practices, both rulers and the ruled ones legitimize the power relations behind the hegemonic discourse, or simply hegemony.

Laclau and Mouffe take the role of subjectivity further, deconstructing the agents behind power relations. While Gramsci still regards inherent class interests and the proletariat as the main promoters of social change, those theorists move towards a perspective on social structures and agents as provisory constructions, constituting a unified actor by the amalgamation of different elements

---

<sup>17</sup> This clarification is needed as I interchangeably use these terms, in particular “Essex school” and “Laclau’s (theory of) discourse analysis”.

<sup>18</sup> That is often criticized as “economic reductionism”.

<sup>19</sup> I use the term neutral to separate from the Marxist criticism on ideology *per se*, and to present is a discourse like any other. Of course, ideology can feature positive and negative aspects, depending on one’s normative perspective.

(meanings) with which they identify. These elements can often be contradictory, dictated by contingent circumstances. Moreover, this process also occurs by identifying with (and sometimes “otherizing”) external references—their “constitutional outsides” (idem. 109-111).

Adding the Lacanian concept of lack to the account, these processes become not only consequence of political activity, but also a necessity for them to occur. The semiotic split of the sign between signifier and signified becomes a radical “constitutive split of all social identity” (Laclau 1994:35), which endures constant (re)construction since “one needs to identify with something because there is an originary and insurmountable lack of identity” (idem. 3). This “radical constructivism”, as Laclau puts it, ensues an eternally contingent political struggle, as identities bear “deeply ambiguous conditions of existence” due to this original lack. One can confirm it empirically, in any political struggle—otherwise, these would end once all “true” identities have become definitively *discovered*, rather than *constructed*. Laclau speculates about this hypothetical situation, concluding that it would lead through an ultimate order, what paradoxically would mean the end of political competition in society (i.e. democracy) (Laclau 1994). Ultimately, that would mean the end of politics as a whole, as there would be no need for power struggles.

Discourses, in this perspective, result from the urge to fulfil the impossible condition of a closed and complete system. They take shape in hegemonic projects<sup>20</sup> competing to create new social orders by joining a variety of disperse elements in order to create stable systems of meaning (Howarth 2000:109-110). This implies that elements do not belong to specific groups (i.e. no essential connection), and as such can be constantly and freely articulated in different discursive practices, given the context. These stable systems of meanings are, therefore, an attempt at reaching the impossible state of a closed system. While a delicate balance can be established through discursive practices, at some point elements will not be successfully symbolized by the dominant discursive order, unveiling its contingency and generating *dislocations* that eventually disrupt it (idem. 111; Laclau 1990:39-41). If a discourse is resilient enough, these dislocations may be incorporated into the system, thus resulting in a new level of relative equilibrium. In any case, the discursive struggle keeps its momentum.

There is an evident time dimension to Essex School’s interpretation of social and political existence. Its emphasis on the dynamic interaction of elements, executed by antagonistic discourses ultimately subject to contingency, creates a relation between power and time dimensions. Under this perspective, any relatively successful (hegemonic) discourse means in fact “freezing”—or severely slowing down—a fleeting reality, which constantly changing due to an ultimately impossible equilibrium.

---

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, “project” is not the best term, as it implies a deliberate course of action, what may or may not be the case.

Time, in the concrete dimension of human existence, can only be approached retroactively, in the form of the “past” and the related practices of historical narratives and memorization. I now proceed to explore this topic.

### 2.3.3 History, memory and myth

History is a fundamental aspect of social existence. The tradition of telling happenings of the past was present in every human grouping as a mean to recall events considered important to the community and to keep their memory through the newer generations. Nonetheless, this “original” form of history was not an activity by itself; its significance was showed by its function, which was based on the present needs of the group, in particular its cohesion. As a sort of storytelling, this kind of history did not necessarily have a time dimension, making it difficult to draw clear lines between the “historical” and the “mythical”. Our modern conception of history, however, requires a factual observation of the unfolding of events, including a chronology<sup>21</sup> and, therefore, progression—As Hobsbawm (1972:15) puts it, “history is directional change”.

Herodotus, dubbed “the father” of history, gave its contribution through narratives of the places he had been; as such, geographical and cultural descriptions were included as part of a wider account than that of history alone. Moreover, its stated goal was to preserve the *memory* of the Greek and barbarian societies and explain the *causes* of their conflicts (Carr 1987:87). Accordingly, history implied social chronicles intended to serve as practical advice to the present.

Whereas history departed from storytelling by adding the time factor, both activities still shared a present-time objective. During the middle Ages, traders would record their transactions for long periods to keep their prosperity; noble families would track their genealogy to support territorial and social claims; biographies would be made to celebrate individuals and justify their deeds. The Catholic Church was the guardian of historical chronology par excellence, grounding much of spiritual authority on it.<sup>22</sup> In an intimate connection between history and memorization, the recalling the orality of the historical events were highly regarded by religious and philosophical scholars of the period (Le Goff 2003:445-451). At the same time, historical recording was mainly based on anecdotal reports.

Conversely, the modern discipline of history, with defined methodologies and procedures beyond individual cognitive abilities and detached from immediate functions—an important requisite for it

---

<sup>21</sup> Literally, the study of time.

<sup>22</sup> The change from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian one, for instance, took place mostly to keep the Easter aligned with the spring (March) equinox.

to be taken as scientifically impartial—appeared only after the Enlightenment and the emergence of the scientific method. In line with the general positivist shift, historical studies began to revolve around an empirical “cult of facts” which could be assembled in an objective description, independent of any circumstances (Carr 1987:7-11). Abstracted from social reality, the description of “great events and personalities” would therefore provide a “true” history, ensuing specific outcomes in a sort of historical determinism. Not by accident, it is during the developments of the historic discipline in the nineteenth century that nationalist movements emerged through and from claims of historical justice.

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the discipline had evolved to several new ramifications on how to study history, including metahistorical analysis such as the philosophy of history. Philosophy of history reflected on issues related to historic analysis and the historiographical activity<sup>23</sup>, questioning whether history can be objectively appraised; whether historical progression can determinate future events; whether there is a common purpose to historical progression; whether there is a linear historical progression at all—just to mention some of the most relevant debates.

Different methodologies and schools emerged from these debates, such as Historicism, Materialism (Marxism) and cultural history. By interpreting history from a sociological perspective, the French Analles School started developing a social history. In contrast to the traditional historiography focused on notable personalities, politics and events, this school emphasized the “long history” represented by the enduring habits in and of a society, as well as its evolution throughout time. In this vein, the role of collective memory became central to its historical debate, through the appraisal not of individual happenings, but of social and cultural developments throughout time, in words, images, gestures, rites and holidays (Le Goff 2003:466).

The concept of collective memory was first introduced by the work of Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory* (1992). Influenced by another French sociologist, Émile Durkheim, Halbwachs draws from his theories on collective behaviour and organization to think of collective memory as a shifting phenomenon, dependent upon language and socialization processes in a community. Thus, in its collective form, memory is not a cognitive attribute to be analysed in neurological terms, but a social construction closely related to history. The processes of memorization define not only a group’s shared perception of the past, but ultimately its collective identity as well. Due to this process, collective memory often becomes a sacred entity linking different generations, acting as subtle yet powerful mechanisms for generating and sustaining social solidarity” (Bell 2006:5). That explains the considerable social costs of the disruption of its historical narrative—the protracted transition from socialism in Eastern Europe, and in particular from the Soviet system, is a good example of the

---

<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, Historiography, meaning the writing (recording) of history.

social impact of identitary changes brought up by a radical reassessment of historical memory.

Accordingly, the process of memorization is essential to historical pursuit. We access history from the present, and this retrieval of past events can only take place in the form of memory. Collective memory is at the roots of any historical formulation in any community, and its most consensual versions become part of the established official historiography—Halbwachs calls it “historical memory”. By contrast, the notion of the past as a “pattern or model for the present, storehouse and repository of experience, wisdom and moral precept” (Hobsbawm 1972:15) indicates that even the most widely accepted versions of history cannot be taken as a disinterested (i.e. objective) description detached from contextualization. Whereas Megill (2007:111) is right in considering the study of history a “balancing act” between the personal values of the historian and some sort of objectivity, it is also true that individuals cannot be isolated from their environment and its biases, as they mostly occur at an unconscious level. Even though empirical evidence is necessary for the reconstitution of the past, the process of writing history cannot be strictly an empirical process, and historians are the ones to determine which facts of the past will become historical “facts” (Carr 1987:22; Le Goff 1987:29-30). Moreover, the cultural shift towards postmodernism in historiography, following the wider epistemic trend mentioned before, meant that communities more openly dealt with history not as a “master of life”, but rather as a “mirror of [their] own idiosyncrasies” and an essential element to their identity (Le Goff 2003:138). In this context, memory and history merge in an interesting combination, similar to the prehistoric practice of storytelling.

The existence of “History” as a discipline in modern education systems highlights the importance of the past as “a collective continuity of experience” (Hobsbawm 1972:13) and “a permanent dimension of human consciousness” (idem. 15). At the same time, it serves as a common referential point that nonetheless cannot have an unambiguous interpretation. Culture, tradition and customs and individual perceptions make part of what Toshchenko (2010:39,47) calls “random information” in historical consciousness<sup>24</sup>. This random information is what actually makes memory and history unique rather than universal, hinting at the impossibility to access the past outside of the present—and of a history without memory.

These definitions prevent any attempt at establishing a distinction between history and collective memory as, respectively, an objective and a subjective appreciation of the past; in addition, they highlight the problematic nature of historical narratives by uncovering political aspects of its recording. In ancient Rome, the emperors “seized” collective memory through public monuments and

---

<sup>24</sup> The term “historical consciousness” probably comes from a Marxist interpretation of history. It is akin to the term “class consciousness” as a truthful understanding of one’s social and cultural conditions, in contrast to those tainted by ideology—as such, it is not useful in an analysis that questions historical truthfulness.

its carved inscriptions, the epigraphs; the Senate, in turn, could refute the imperial tyranny through the opposite practice, erasing the name of a deceased emperor from the official documents. (Le Goff 2003:437). More recently, the French revolution and the birth of the modern nation-states prompted the appearance of national holidays, which, in the absence of metaphysical legitimacy, functioned as a “‘repetitive service’ in this civic religion” (Nyyssönen 2009: 138), thus fostering memory. Likewise, archives and museums as a way to connect the people to the established political institutions through rituals of remembrance (idem. 2003:451-459). Perhaps in the most emblematic case of memory as a living agent of individual and social existence is that of the Egyptian pharaohs: in order to have their souls remembered, they would have their name inscribed as much as possible in sacred sites and official records. Even if for metaphysical reasons, the social function of history—and the worldly fear of forgetfulness—is present.

The role of collective historical remembrance as a socio-political agent, as proposed in this thesis, means that the past is not necessarily “used” or “distorted”, but rather that it takes specific orientations according to its place in the wider system of meanings in a society. Accordingly, “the real past” or “the real history” never truly exist as absolutes, unless for the moment when they were the present—but at that time they were not considered past or history. Recollecting history is reliving it in the present and conforming it to specific circumstances. History, thus, becomes part of the “political”, bearing, for practical purposes, a similar existential condition as that of “reality”, which ultimately cannot exist without the universe of human mind to interpret it.<sup>25</sup>

In this context, the reflection upon Carr’s (1987:30) definition of history as “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the past and the present” results in a conception of the past as having practical value<sup>26</sup> only as a mental imagery belonging to the present. From the viewpoint of discourse analysis as proposed by the Essex school past, along with memory and history, are also precarious symbolic structures in motion towards the resolution of an identity lack. As a “highly selective image” of the past (Bell 2006:2), history becomes a contingent set of elements articulated by specific perspectives within a society—to put it shortly, a discursive practice as any other.

By treating history as a sort of discourse subject to the processes described earlier in this chapter, it is relevant only as a process guiding social practices. Gramsci discarded history as a science,

---

<sup>25</sup> This paradoxical affirmation is still highly controversial and virtually unverifiable in everyday existence, and any further elaboration on it is not feasible in this work. Nonetheless, in modern times it was originally conceived by the theory of relativity, and further elaborated in studies on quantum physics and on motions close to the speed of light, where the distortion of time—and therefore its relativity—is scientifically proved to happen. Before that, ancient (mostly Eastern) spiritual traditions already had the relativity of time as an axiom. For an extensive elaboration on the subject, see *Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics* (1975).

<sup>26</sup> Or practical *existence*, if we keep to the assumptions postulated.



subjecting it to praxis and to the politico-ideological constructions governing social life, thus becoming an organic expression of the hegemonic group in power<sup>27</sup> (Le Goff 2003:99-101). Memory, and therefore history, is choice: a system of representation susceptible to different and competing articulations in political struggle. It can be deconstructed—and its endless chain of elements rearranged through the process.

Historical narratives are usually rather stable articulations, since they usually play a central role in collective identity—using Laclau’s terminology, it is a “more sedimented” discourse. In this sense, their practical political applications tend to be more efficient in discourses that assimilate its established elements, instead of refuting them. Alternatively, limited rearticulation of some elements might also work for their successful assimilation by a discourse. Since the process of identification with a specific historical narrative is the cornerstone of most modern communities, it is closely related to culture—and both represent resilient discursive practices. Moreover, time works on history’s favour, as the repetition of its elements reinforce its pertinence, which in turn reinforces its elements, in a vicious cycle. This is what the semiotician Yuri Lotman means by reasoning that “retrospective views intensifies determinacy” (1990:233). In the same vein as Carr, this author points to a “[...] constant dialogue: texts from chronologically earlier periods are brought into culture and, interacting with contemporary mechanisms, generate an image of the historical past which culture transfers into the past and which, like an equal partner in a dialogue, affects the present.” (idem. 272)

At some point, a historical narrative might become hegemonic and undisputed, pervading most spheres of social activity as a lesson and an inspiration. As with pre-scientific historical narratives, an event of the past might become and end in itself, detached from its temporal dimension. At this point, there ceases to be a search for its causation and development, and it becomes a memento continuously guiding social practice; as a (relatively) static model, it acquires the status of a myth.

Nowadays, common understanding considers myth to be a practice rendered obsolete by empiric observations and the modern scientific paradigm, whereas the realm of what cannot be perceived by the senses—be it spiritual, metaphysical or mystical—is relegated to the field of religion or, at best—from the scientific viewpoint—philosophy. Myths are problematic as they challenge the distinction between the “comprehensive” physical world and the metaphysical—that which cannot be proved or disproved by science nor has any practical impact in ordinary life<sup>28</sup>. If on one hand they cannot be scientifically manageable, if they are hardly accepted in a purely religious sense as well; more often

---

<sup>27</sup> According to this work’s post-Gramscian approach, I would replace *group* in power by *discourse* in power.

<sup>28</sup> That is why I refer to a “comprehensive” physical world, for it encompasses intangible aspects, which nonetheless have a practical impact on life, such as social practices, political orientations and cultural heritage.

than not, they face substantial resistance by institutionalized religion.<sup>29</sup>

Standing somewhere between these categories, it is not a surprise that myth thrived in prehistorical, or perhaps ahistorical times, when secular and spiritual practices were deeply enmeshed in daily community life. In a period without history, religion, nor any meaningful distinction between art and science, accounts on everyday situation usually took metaphorical forms, and myths had the primary function of filling explanatory gaps in psychologically satisfying, albeit not necessarily feasible, narratives. Being beyond the ordinary dimensional spectrum of time and space, there are no concerns on the truthfulness of these narratives—they exist as an ever-present reality, as long as people accept and live by it.

Accordingly, the modern usage of the word tends to be limited to its negative connotation, as a story that members of a given social group regard as true and authoritative, but that the speaker dismisses as false (Lincoln 1989:24). This lack of commitment with ordinary laws of physics and logics, however, does not mean that a mythological narrative *must* be unrealistic—i.e. fantastic. In this sense, myths can and do occur in modern society. Pêcheux (1982:108 *apud* Howarth 2000:95) mentions the myth of the “self-made man” in capitalist societies: by abstracting the individual from the whole structure that allows him to act in the first place, the quintessential successful entrepreneur supposedly “makes it (entirely) on his own”. Similarly, myths of common ancestry still work as a unifying force to communities and people everywhere, from Chinese citizens to residents of present-day Rome. In Le Goff (2003), myths are described as atemporal (ahistorical) accounts, featuring a normative dimension—the moral in a precautionary tale—and, perhaps most importantly, evoking “epicness”. There is no need for a myth to be fantastic, but it must be heroic or impressive—preferably both.

In a similar vein, Lincoln (1989:24) categorizes historical narratives as Fable, Legend, History and Myth; each of it has, in an ascending order, more relevance on the organization of a community. In his terminology, Fable is pure and simple fiction, without any pretension to an accurate portrayal of events. Going one step further, legends already claim to be truthful descriptions of events, but lack credibility. History, in this categorization, has the same attributes already discussed: a narrative that a community considers to be a faithful account of events, therefore boasting wide acceptance among its audience. The final category, myth, is not only widely recognized by the established social structures, but also has a normative character with such an impact as to regulate everyday social practice—in Lincoln’s terms, these stories possess both credibility and authority, possessing not only

---

<sup>29</sup> This is nothing new, as even in secular European and American societies, a reference to the bible as “Christian mythology” might be rebuffed as aggressive atheism by conservative sectors of these societies.

the status of truth, but “paradigmatic truth” (ibid.).

By focusing on its sociological relevance, Lincoln’s categorization allows an interesting perspective on myth not as an alternative to history, but as history with some additional attributes. In his now classic study on the topic, Claude Levi-Strauss (1963:206-232) refers to myth as both historical and ahistorical<sup>30</sup>; a “double structure” that refers to a specific event that allegedly took place in the past, but that has its “operative value” in the timelessness of the specific pattern it describes. In this light, the latter is what renders myth authoritative. Furthermore, this pattern presents itself as a rational practice, since “the kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and [that] the difference lies, not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied” (idem. 230). Since Levi-Strauss’ main object of study were the prehistoric (or ahistorical) societies mentioned above, he still keeps the literal notion of myth, presenting it as a narrative that in modern society was largely replaced by politics (idem. 209). As a discursive practice underlying social and political organization, however, I would broaden this traditional notion to any authoritative discourse of paradigmatic significance to any society.

Roland Barthes (1972), in his book *Mythologies*, compiles articles on what he sees as myths of his time and society, and further elaborates on their functioning. The author argues that myths are not specific concepts or ideas, but rather a system of communication. As “form without content”, everything can be “mythable” if framed under the system generated by this type of speech. Using semiotics (which he calls semiology), Barthes presents myth as a “second-order” of relations between signified and signifier: the first order poses the original meaning, which is emptied by the structure of the myth. The sign becomes just a signifier for a new, more fundamental meaning. Barthes gives a simple example to this otherwise complicated description of myth: a Latin grammar with the sentence “*quia ego nominor leo*”. The sentence originally means “because my name is lion”, but that does not tell us anything. The original meaning does not signify anything; it has to empty itself to refer to its deeper meaning: it is a grammatical example (idem. 113-114). In concrete political terms, the author mentions image of “the negro<sup>31</sup>” in military form saluting the French flag: it symbolizes the French multicultural, transcontinental empire.

A critical assessment of the role of myth follows. As an articulatory practice, it “leaves its [the meaning’s] contingency behind; [...] [meaning] becomes impoverished” (idem. 116). Myths make things lose their historical value to represent naturalness, “it is [their] very principle to transform

---

<sup>30</sup> Using a structuralist semiotic approach, Levi-Strauss equates the ahistorical aspect with the Saussurean *langue*, or a complete structure, and the historical aspect with *parole*, a specific stance of this structure.

<sup>31</sup> Beyond political correctness, I kept the original term on purpose, as it helps in desmystifying the problematic aspects of this adulatory narrative (myth) about the country.

history into nature” (idem. 128). By contextualizing a meaning into a wider one, it has a double function “it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” (idem. 115). Barthes describes the same duality Levi-Strauss infers, but in terms of opposition: what for the latter is “the universal function of speaking to all people in all societies” (Levi-Strauss 1968:210) through atemporality, for Barthes is “the privation of history” (1972:152).

Although Barthes analysis is very insightful in explaining the role of myth as a “naturalizing” practice, I believe he bases his opposition upon an objectivist view of history, even if not consciously; unless one assume there is a truthful, “pure” history, myths incorporate historical narratives rather than negate it. From the arguments in introduced before, it follows that myth’s timelessness cannot exist without its roots in a past event. Regardless of the theoretical standpoint, the dual dimension of myth is always present, dead as history and alive as authoritative practice, paradigm or simply “nature”.

Due to its merging of the time and the timeless dimensions, myth is one of the most successful discursive practices available, and as a result are present in any hegemonic discourse. The general attempt of discourses to freeze the dynamic interaction of meanings into a static structure spontaneously occur in a mythological narrative. Discursive articulation needs materiality to be realistic and feasible on the social sphere; at the same time, it also needs to avoid it in order to last as a structure of meaning amid a process in which its constitutive parts (meanings) are in constant motion. The essentially dual dimension of myth reduces this paradox of discursive struggle, giving leeway for the basis to move without collapsing the system constructed upon it. It also corroborates Lincoln’s claim of authority of a myth, since it gives a natural justification to a historical intention (Barthes 1972:142). It “evoke[s] the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed”, and its repetition “can help to maintain society in its regular and accustomed forms” (Lincoln 1989:25). For its resilience, different versions of a myth do not necessarily threat its discursive stability, as the abstractness from specific instances—i.e. its atemporality—operates in the background.

Past is the period of which we do not have direct memory (Hobsbawm 1972:2), and is represented by history and memory. Occurring under specific narrative frames as something out of our direct experience, these two representational systems only have a mediated (i.e. subjective) existence (Olick & Robins 1998:110). If postmodernism questions the distinction between knowledge and interpretation, it can be argued that there is a shift in the primary function in studying history and social realities as a whole: from reaching epistemological truth, but rather inferring meaningfulness.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> This point was inspired by a remark made by Olicker and Robins (1998:110), but the authors did not defend it themselves.

Finally, to side myth with history is useful in analytical terms as well; in regards to the concrete impact on social practices, both fulfil the same function (Levis-Strauss 1979). Therefore, this research focuses on how the Great Patriotic War is collectively experienced in post-Soviet Russian society, rather than on the significance of specific events; even when working on historical narratives, discursive practices can be articulated without the need of “hard” historical facts. This is the case in this work. I now move to present the final considerations on its theoretical perspective.

## 2.4 Perceptions of meaning and discourse

This chapter outlines the theoretical perspective that is used in this research. By starting with the presentation of semiotics, I focused on the developments in social research to argue for a subjective appreciation the phenomena surrounding us. My argument is that “our specific understanding” of the world is the only one available, without any possibility of an objective benchmark to compare it with. Thus, “our reality” can be considered a representational system in its entirety, where each of its objects are, in an ultimate analysis, simplifications made by the mind in order to be approached in a rational and useful manner. Human perception is always limited by biases originated in previous experiences, as well as by cognitive limitations—we receive information on our surrounding world using our five senses, but it would be preposterous to assume that these are the only possible tools available, at least if one takes the theory of evolution (of species) seriously enough. Anything that individuals and their collective organizations can name is always subject to a relative arbitrariness and a fundamental absence of “things-as-such”—their constitutive, essential lack. To make this point, I resorted to theoretical reasoning rather than empirical examples; as such, this chapter provides the work with its foundation and leading inspiration. This does not mean that a practical approach is not needed; on the contrary, it is the only way of conducting meaningful research. The only useful way to reckon the speed of a car moving down the road is by establishing its speed in relation to its observer (or in a convention agreed upon by the involved parts), but also by abstracting factors such as the speed of rotation of the earth, as well as the speed of a drifting galaxy in a (possibly) infinite universe; at the same time, the only way not to be misled by appearance is to keep all these factors in mind—otherwise, a rational process becomes a simplistic (i.e. reductionist) one.

Indeed, the argument could have started from a philosophical perspective, whose contribution for the same conclusions have a long and established tradition<sup>33</sup>. I avoided this perspective in order to limit the scope of a prolific topic of discussion to the practical needs of this work, and even that resulted

---

<sup>33</sup> Just to name a few, nihilism, existentialism, absurdism, scepticism and relativism all have embraced, to some extent, uncertainty about “things”.

in a discussion of a wide range of terms and concepts. It is now time to sum it up, and refine our definition on some of the concepts used throughout this chapter.

From the very beginning, I used terms such as sign, element, meaning, discourse, ideology, symbolic (or discursive) order, almost at will. The purpose was to look beyond names. Indeed, if reality is a system of representations, all these terms shape its factuality (or “suchness”); *signs*, *elements* and *meanings* are thus its “atoms”, as approached respectively by semiotics, Laclau’s discourse analysis and layman language (the word meaning does not belong to any specific “field”). But even the word atom does not apply in a strict sense, for any meaning can be further divided and become a set of smaller meanings, thus a system prompting political action (*ideology*), guiding daily life (a general *symbolic order*<sup>34</sup> or a specific *myth*) or simply existing as an object of analysis, as with the use of the rather neutral term *discourse*. Conversely, these systems can themselves be part of a wider system of meanings, in an endless chain of signifiers<sup>35</sup> whose ultimate component would be “reality”—from my methodological perspective, the quintessential “empty signifier”, a term that I develop in the next chapter.

Since there is an endless progression (or regression) of meanings, where it will fit in the traditional dichotomy of unit vs. structure (or *langue* vs. *parole*) solely depends on the analytical perspective used. Nonetheless, a definition of each category is necessary for effective communication (Chandler 2007:60). When analysing *unit*, I will use all the terms interchangeably—be it sign, element or meaning. When considering the macro level, though, these terms require well-defined “circumstances of use” in order to avoid what Howarth (2000:104) calls a “total free-play of meaning”. This research deals with the Great Patriotic War as a myth.

As already mentioned, myth in this work denotes a specific sort of discourse. Its double-structure couples a specific *narrative* on past events with a model for action by the members of its group; therefore, a historic account coexists with a timeless paradigm, granting its authority in its community. If we accept political organization as an attempt to build a stable system of meaning amid a dynamic flow of signifiers, the centrality of myth in social, political and cultural structures lies in its ability to, as Barthes (1972) argues, naturalize a specific set of practices in *any* circumstance.

Chandler’s (2007:13) definition of human beings as “*homo significans* – meaning makers” is highly suggestive of our “reality” as not much more than a thin fabric of (circumstantially) objective relations

---

<sup>34</sup> This term refers in particular to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, which, unfortunately, is out of the scope of this research. Nonetheless, some authors I used employed it, and therefore it might appear in this work.

<sup>35</sup> In this regard, many authors use the word “signifier” instead of “sign”, showing that the former is not only a constitutive part of the latter (as in classical Saussurean semiotics), but also a sign on its own. Although not analyzed here, semiotics as conceived by Charles Peirce explicitly mentions an “infinite semiosis”.

amid an endless uncertainty. Semiotics, discourse analysis and the postmodern *zeitgeist* played a great role in putting any considerations on reality in perspective, pointing to the importance of deconstructing assumptions that limit our ability to understand phenomena. At the same time, their shortcoming lies in the fact that the acceptance of rules and norms agreed by its community (in our case, the academic community) is inevitable—unless some things are taken for granted, no meaningful explanation can occur.

If the theoretical perspective is one of *absolute relativity*, its practical instance must be one of *relative absolutism*, or at least a loose version of it. In a sense, this duplicity replicates the secular debate on understanding (*verstehen*) vs. explaining (*erklären*) in philosophy and social sciences. To navigate between these two oppositional directions is a hard task, and it certainly was a major issue in conducting this project. In a similar consideration, Howarth (2005:337) points out that

Derrida suggests there are no fully saturated contexts, as the traces of signifiers are always detectable in innumerable other contexts. Instead, the researcher is compelled to make decisions about the appropriate level and degree of contextualization and must establish the limits of any particular project. The key principles underpinning these decisions are that they must be explicit, consistent, and justified.

Pragmatically, research discourse analysis must abide by its feasibility (to which extent it is doable) and relevance (to which extent it meets criteria such as coherency and accuracy). The main question seems to be: “when should I stop questioning and accept what I see for granted (no matter how arbitrary it might be)?”. The answer will certainly be an arbitrary one as well, but it must be addressed if something is to be concluded.

I now proceed to present my methodological perspective in depth, moving toward its practical application.

### 3. DISCOURSE AND MEANING IN OPERATION: METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Exploring the Essex school of discourse analysis

Discourse theory, as proposed by Laclau and the Essex school, “assumes that all objects and actions are meaningful, and that their meaning is conferred by historically specific systems of rules [...] [depending] on the orders of discourse that constitute its identity and significance” (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:2-3). In proposing this inclusive range of analytical—or analysable—objects, it presents a criticism to essentialist, positivist and behaviouralist paradigms (idem.1, 5-6): it considers objects and actions to be devoid of a closed, fixed meaning and that mechanical laws cannot explain social relations; finally, it considers that there are no divisions between socially constructed meanings and objective political facts—indeed, the latter is seen as just another expression of the former. As already mentioned, this orientation of discourse analysis emphasizes socio-political struggle around specific ideals and objectives, at the same time that it rejects material conditions and class belonging as unchangeable and causal determinants of the social processes. By questioning the notion of “group” as a fixed set of ideas and interests, their collective identity presents itself as a discursive practice. Therefore, both political practices and the political agents that promote them can be studied through the same methodological procedure.

Under this perspective, several meanings (or elements) are articulated to give birth to socially constructed discourses. This process happens through the association of meanings that imply a positioning in relation to an “anti-meaning” that gives it significance, as Derrida suggested. For instance, we cannot define a discourse on “proletarian ideals” without defining, consciously or not, one on “non-proletarian ideals”, thus “drawing a frontier between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’” (idem. 4). The dynamic articulation of meanings and their representations imply that these discourses are changeable historical constructions; their contingent nature means that they can give only a provisory solution to socio-political struggles. The partiality of these discourses leads to the “structural impossibility” of social systems. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985:105) concisely describe their conceptualization of discourse analysis:

we will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call *discourse*. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call *moments*. By contrast, we will call *element* any difference that is not discursively articulated. (Italics in the original).

In my work, the concept of “element” (or “signifier”) is neutral—in the sense that, if it is not discursively articulated, it will be qualified as a “floating” element/signifier. It is important to note



that nothing defines beforehand which floating elements will take part in which discourse. As a kind of discourse, identities “emerge through the articulation and rearticulation of signifying elements” (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:7). In this regard, Laclau describes these dynamics through the “logics of equivalence” and the “logics of difference”. As Howarth and Stavrakakis put it:

[the logics of equivalence] functions by creating equivalential identities that express a pure negation of a discursive system. [...] [in one case] ‘the people’ [were] able to weaken their internal differences and organize themselves as ‘the oppressed’, by opposing themselves to a series of others. In this way, the government, the incumbent President, the Church, landlords and entrepreneurs were made equivalent to one another by being presented as ‘the oppressors’ of the people. If the logic of equivalence functions by splitting a system of differences and instituting a political frontier between two opposed camps, the logic of difference does exactly the opposite. It consists in the expansion of a given system of differences by dissolving existing chains of equivalence and incorporating these disarticulated elements into an expanding order [...] Whereas a project employing the logic of equivalence seeks to divide social space by condensing meanings around two antagonistic poles, a project employing a logic of difference attempts to weaken and displace a sharp antagonistic polarity, endeavouring to relegate that division to the margins of society. (idem. 11)

To a certain extent, the definition of these concepts might sound counterintuitive, as one could expect to use the terms “equivalence” and “difference” inverted to the way Laclau did—after all, the logics of equivalence described above *accentuates* differences. I believe this terminology was chosen because his points of reference are the floating, unarticulated elements, which are indeed annexed by articulated discourse through the logics of difference, and are ousted (alienated) through generalizing them in an “anti-discourse” by the logic of equivalence.

Since this perspective highlights the relational aspects of discourses, the question arises as to which of them is successful enough in articulating elements as to incorporate a great amount of the stock of signifiers available at a given time and space—in other words, those becoming hegemonic. The developments underneath the discourses do not necessarily occur in an intentional fashion, but rather are prompted by changes of the political beings themselves, which reorganize, add and exclude some of the concepts (elements) that form their identity. As mentioned before, these *dislocations* are witnessed when there is an identification with—or un-identification from—a specific concept, such as “proletarian”, “patriot”, “democratic” or any other discursive structure. For an identity to be changed, there must be some degree of acknowledgement by the political being of different identities, and this awareness makes the contingent nature of a discourse visible, at least while a new one is not completely consolidated (i.e. becomes hegemonic) (idem. 19-20). While dislocations can be considered some sort of rupture in the hegemonic discourse, the logics of equivalence and difference resume their dynamic course on a new equilibrium of the hegemonic discourse—or in an entirely new one, in case the previous one fails to absorb the dislocation.

In order to comprehend the cohesion that gives articulated elements such robustness as to become hegemonic discourses, it is important to explore the concepts of *nodal points* and *empty signifiers*. Nodal point is the structural position of a “privileged signifier”, a reference point that manages to articulate and temporarily fix several meanings, or floating signifiers, around it. Catchwords such as “communism”, “capitalism”, “independence” and “freedom” work as nodal points for many discourses, and “the major aim of hegemonic projects is to construct and stabilise the nodal points that form the basis of concrete social orders by articulating as many available elements—floating signifiers—as possible” (Laclau 1990 *apud* Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:15). In this work, I argue that the Great Patriotic War narrative in Russia is a solid nodal point, successfully articulating several meanings around it—therefore, being a strong legitimizer of the overarching state of affairs in modern Russian (i.e. its hegemonic discourse).

In the move towards hegemony, the more a nodal point agglomerates signifiers around it, the less it can have a well-delimited signifier of its own—a paradox Laclau defines as “empty signifier”. Based on the semiotic interpretation of signs as promoted by Saussure, a definition of something is only in relational terms, always implying the definition of “not-something” (Chandler 2007:21). Similarly, Laclau contends the impossibility of positive concepts that would compose a closed, non-provisional, system (Laclau 2005:36-37). The oppositional factor, the negativity of something, is always there, and it is more pertinent the broader the articulation of equivalences. In other words, “the longer the chain of equivalences is, the less concrete this “‘something equally present’ [the empty signifier] will be” (idem.40), and a discourse manages to articulate elements around it by pointing to something there is not. For the discourse on “freedom” to be hegemonic, for instance, there must be an evident lack of freedom; conversely, if freedom were eventually achieved, the discourse on it would lose its power. Therefore, an empty signifier is strong exactly because of “the presence of its absence”: “[...] we are faced with a constitutive lack, with an impossible object which, as in Kant, shows itself through the impossibility of its adequate representation” (idem. 39). As such, an empty signifier is always relative to the discursive structure analysed; it does not need to be an empty signifier in all articulations taking place at a specific time. In a radical poststructuralist approach, the absolute empty signifier would be “reality”—the ultimate definition of “something equally present” to such an extent as to be impossible to be properly represented.

Moreover, this dynamic articulatory process might elucidate the presence of both the discourse with its meanings and their negation, as argued by Torfing (2005:16):

As the chain of equivalence is extended to include still more elements it becomes clear that the excluded elements can only have one thing in common: they pose a threat to the discursive system.[...]. In this sense, the process of ‘othering’ helps to stabilize the discursive system. However, the price for this stabilization is

the introduction of a radical other that threatens and problematizes the discursive system and prevents it from achieving a full closure.

As I approached in the previous chapter, the process of otherization is a fundamental aspect of establishing any identity, and it is an essential aspect of the logics of equivalence. By generalizing sets of meanings in an antagonistic whole, the logics of equivalence polarizes the discourse between what is “ours” and a concrete other perceived as a threat—a negative identity to be rejected by its “subjects”<sup>36</sup>. In the Russian case, the War narrative is remarkably strong in associating “fascism”, its historical antithesis (“other”), with groups that nowadays are seen as threatening the symbolic order of modern Russia as a political entity, as I shall argue. The logics of difference, in its turn, might do just the opposite: by breaking chains of equivalence, it seeks to incorporate problematic elements in a non-threatening way, pushing to the margins of the discursive logic those that cannot be assimilated without undermining it. Although not directly approached by this work, the use of state revenues obtained from oil and gas production, as well as social and cultural expressions, to co-opt antagonist movements and feelings into the main discursive practice can be considered an example of the logics of difference in operation in Putin’s Russia. Both the logics of equivalence and of difference take place at the frontline of discursive struggles, answering to the very urge of expanding its order to obtain or keep a hegemonic status.

Nonetheless, these procedures cannot produce a *complete* system of meanings, as achieving its full closure is impossible. This primordial lack is what motivates political struggle, at the same time that it precludes its solution. Thus, discourses are precarious unities following each other in the task of fulfilling the necessity of their circumstances, and can only be accessed to the extent in which they manage to take control of the meanings available in these circumstances. Behind the dynamicity of this process lies the structural impossibility of stable social systems for more than short time frames. Therefore, these systems are not only discourses, but also fleeting *moments*, as proposed in Laclau’s terminology. It all depends on the perspective chosen: what is a consistent discourse in a static appreciation can be a very volatile articulation of elements in a dynamic perspective. To some extent, a successful discourse is one that allows the inexorable flux of meanings to take their own course at the same time that it manages to keep them within the reach of its static core, represented by nodal points and main signifiers. This duplicity is much akin to what I presented as the “double-structure” of a myth, and further corroborates the reach of its authority.

To summarize, Torfing (2005:14-17) introduces five arguments on the rationale behind the

---

<sup>36</sup> The subjects of a discourse are all those that abide by it, regardless of their capacity for influencing its articulatory practice—i.e. both rulers and the ruled are vulnerable to its normative effect.

articulatory practices of discourse:

“The first argument is that all forms of social practice take place against a background of historically specific discourses, which can be broadly defined as relational systems of signification. [...] The second argument is that discourse is constructed in and through hegemonic struggles that aim to establish a political and moral-intellectual leadership through the articulation of meaning and identity. [...] The third argument is that the hegemonic articulation of meaning and identity is intrinsically linked to the construction of social antagonism, which involves the exclusion of a threatening Otherness that stabilizes the discursive system while, at the same time, preventing its ultimate closure. [...] The fourth argument is that a stable hegemonic discourse becomes dislocated when it is confronted by new events that it cannot explain, represent, or in other ways domesticate. [...] The final argument is that the dislocation of the discursive structure means that the subject always emerges as a split subject that might attempt to reconstruct a full identity through acts of identification.” (Italics in the original).

With this basic analytical toolkit in mind, I will investigate the articulation of the Great Patriotic War narrative in Russian contemporary political discourse in an attempt draw a picture of its current stage of development. I now proceed to consider the practical applications of our methodological framework, as well as the limitations and problems associated with it.

### 3.2 Discourse analysis in practice

Neumann (2008:76) points out that "Discourse analysts make the world more transparent by demonstrating how its elements interact. By demonstrating that things were not always the way they appear now, discourse analysis makes us aware that they are most probably changing as we speak". This process will govern the empirical aspects of this research.

The investigation of dominant discourses, in this perspective, is the investigation of the features and causes of a hegemonic discourse in a specific, precarious context, and as such can be framed under different logics, such as

“Derrida’s ‘method’ of deconstruction, Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical approaches to discourse analysis, the theory of rhetoric and tropes, Saussure’s distinction between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic poles of language, the Jakobsonian concepts of metaphor and metonymy as developed by Lacan, and Laclau and Mouffe’s logics of equivalence and difference” (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000:7).

Notwithstanding this wide range of possibilities, discourse analysis often suffers from a lack of formal procedures for its practical application. Due to its critical and deconstructivist stances, its theoretical insights meet several hindrances in the attempts at translating them into general, explicit guidelines—in a sense, its analytical strength becomes its operational weakness. The very assumptions of contingency and context-dependency discourse analysts follow to locate their object in a wider

perspective often prevent any strict definition of general procedures without loss of its theoretical coherence. Therefore, at the same time that discourse analysis has a critical approach to more traditional theories, it has few explicit theoretical statements of its own (Howarth 2005:316). This state of affairs often prevents discourse analysis from being fully embraced by mainstream academic research. Howarth (idem. 317) underscores that method is always subject to “ontological and epistemological postulates” and particularities of the specific topic, rather than “a free-standing and neutral set of rules and techniques that can be applied mechanically to all empirical objects”.

On that account, the research must follow a holistic approach, where theory, methodology and data come together in forming its methodological orientation. In this sense, it is a problem-driven approach, rather than method- or theory-driven (idem. 318). There is no specific set of methodological principles established *a priori* which would suit more than just a handful of cases, since it attempts to understand the particularities of a context instead of formulating general rules. Bearing that in mind, the question of data selection is not only one of choosing an input subordinated to a method supported by a specific theory, but rather a key aspect of the definition of the research project itself.

A second drawback for further consolidation of discourse theory in the mainstream of social sciences is its relatively small amount of empirical studies, in particular in the case of the Essex school. Whereas this initial shortage is coherent as a “natural consequence of discourse theory’s attempt to break with traditional theories and establish its own distinctive ontology” (Torfing, 2005:26), it is possible to identify an ongoing phase of proliferation of case studies within this academic orientation. In fact, a growing amount of literature (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000; Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000; Howarth & Torfing 2004; Klymenko 2015; Laclau 1994; Ryazanova-Clarke 2008, 2012) is dedicated to filling this gap, more or less explicitly.

During the past decade, many discourse analysis theoreticians brought their attention to the study of post-Soviet Russia, approaching socio-political processes in terms of how meaning gets articulated in shaping identity and providing support for hegemonic political projects. In this vein, *Identities and Politics during the Putin Presidency* (Perovic & Casula 2009a) is an excellent example of the Essex school’s perspective in practice. The book is a compilation of articles from several authors, coupling theoretical considerations of what the researchers considered to be key concepts for analysing modern Russia, such as populism (Howarth 2009) and dislocation (Norval & Mijnsen 2009) with practical assessments of the changing political and national identities during the 1990s (Casula 2009), of the relative “stabilization” of these identities during the post-Yeltsin period (Perovic & Casula 2009b) and of the “symbolic politics” under Putin (Kurilla 2009a). The authors argue for the necessity of assessing the subject from an inside, Russian perspective (Perovic & Casula 2009a:22). Accordingly,

a growing number of Russian scholars have been using Laclau's theory to study Russian politics. In this vein, Ivan Kurilla explores the Great Patriotic War narrative from different aspects, such as the control of this narrative by the Russian government (2009b); its comparison with different War narratives in Russia and other post-Soviet countries (2012); the implications of this narratives, such as in the new legislation against the "rehabilitation of Nazism" (2014) and even on how the narrative can be affected in the face of new political challenges, such as the what were called "colour revolutions" (2010). Similarly, there have been other endogenous works using tools deployed by the Essex school, approaching modern Russia as a "subaltern empire" (Morozov 2009, 2014) and examining the articulation of "conservatism" as its hegemonic discourse (Prozorov 2005).

Nonetheless, the difficulty in carrying on case studies and empirical analysis in general within the field of discourse analysis and discourse theory still exists. In this respect, we again stumble upon the paradox of meaning, which is necessary and impossible at the same time (Laclau 1990, Torfing 2004). It is necessary because without it we cannot make sense of the world and act upon our reason. At the same time, it is impossible because the relational construction on which meaning is based is itself "subject to endless displacements and constant disruptions"—as such, the conceptualization of meaning is "a hard task that often precludes clear definitions and self-explanatory categories" (Torfing 2004:4).

Under this perspective, any conclusion drawn on socio-political events is a provisional and even arbitrary outcome, a static picture of an inexorably dynamic process. In referring to the linguistic system, which might as well be extended to any discourse, Morozov (2009:577) argues that "the change of one element shifts the entire system of differences into a new state" so that it is possible either to investigate the evolution of single elements (throughout time) or to outline a general picture of the system as a whole, but not both at the same time. Much as the "uncertainty principle" in physics, we can either reckon our object's position or its momentum (direction), but not both at the same time. Contextualization plays a fundamental role in any attempt at analysing and explaining the underlying logics of a discourse. Torfing (2005:9) refers to this as focusing on "the conditions of possibility" rather than on "the factual immediacy" of an event. Using the example of NATO intervention in Kosovo, he argues that "it is not enough to study the factual evidence of the crisis [...] Discourse theory must take one step further and analyse the shifting historical conditions for constructing a military campaign as a humanitarian intervention." (idem. 10).

It follows that every single proposal of a research project in the field constitutes by itself a fresh approach to the theory, which is elaborated along with the definition of the topic to be explored and the systematization of the material to be analysed. In this vein, the matter of establishing which data

to use, as already referred to, must be in tune with the project's main goals and expectations. If anything can have discursive value, variables such as pertinence, relevance and time must be taken into consideration in order to limit the volume of material to be used to a feasible amount.

This research has an open-ended approach to its material, meaning that the set of sources to be examined evolved throughout its development. Although it was partially determined beforehand, the progressive addition—and sometimes substitution—of the material analysed evolved along with the perspective on the research object and its related questions. As there is no golden rule in the selection of the material, even the incrementalist approach of open-ended research projects must eventually come to an end, which is both arbitrary and inevitable—to the extent that it is the only way to conduct meaningful analysis. A reasonable starting point for choosing the material would be to look for what Neumann (2008:67-70) calls “monuments”, canonical texts that are strong representatives of the topic (discourse) addressed, or even foundational documents used as guidelines to its social practices. As established sources, they help understand the central features of the discourse under consideration. As such, they are useful both as objects of analysis by themselves, through the procedure of textual deconstruction, and as points of reference to be used when defining other documents which might be even more pertinent to the analysis in progress. I now proceed to present the data used in this project in detail.

### *3.2.1 Assessing the data*

The topic of the War narrative in Russia can be analysed from many different angles, and indeed the literature on the topic uses a variety of sources, according to the approaches proposed. Nina Tumarkin's (1994) groundbreaking work, *The living and the dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, relied on ethnographic observation and personal accounts to present the first thorough analysis of the War myth in the Soviet Union and Russia. In a similar vein, but in a much more limited scope, Rouhier-Willoughby's (2003) article assesses the Victory Day celebration and the prevailing narratives of the time from personal observation. Another useful approach deals more explicitly with collective memory, evaluating the Russian “mnemonic community”<sup>37</sup> based on school textbooks (Wertsch 2008a, 2008b). Finally, even the analysis of how the written media depicted the Victory Day in different years, as done by Ryazanova-Clarke (2008), may provide valuable insights on the evolution of the War narrative and its role in the wider symbolic order.

My analysis focuses on the yearly pronouncements delivered by the Russian president on the Victory

---

<sup>37</sup> A group united based on common memories (narratives) of past events.

Day. Although the material I chose conveys a strictly official aspect of the War narrative, the chronological analysis of these can reveal how this narrative is articulated within the wider discourse that is behind the social and political order in Putin's Russia. Klymenko (2015) took a similar approach by using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to evaluate commemorative speeches during Victory Day in Ukraine. As such, the scholar assessed the evolution of the narrative on the Second World War as perceived by the last three Ukrainian presidents<sup>38</sup>.

The basic materials for analysis are the yearly "Speeches at the parade marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War" and "Speeches at the reception marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War"<sup>39</sup>. As mentioned before, these instances of formal declarations by the Russian head of state deal with the War narrative in its official version, but they also bring topical considerations on contemporary issues, which open new perspectives on assessing the discourse behind Russia's prevailing political order. Although both Speeches are delivered by the president of the Russian federation, they differ in their nature and target audience. The Speeches at the Parade are instances where the head of states addresses the entire nation, and they take place at the beginning of the Victory Day military parade at the Red Square. The Speeches at the Reception occur at a later moment, inside the Kremlin and directed mainly to the War veterans. Both speeches have wide media coverage in Russia and abroad, being a prominent occasion for political manifestation by the country's leadership. As a result, these Speeches, as well as the commemorative date they represent, provoke intense debates at an international level, not only concerning the events at the time of the Second World War, but also—and perhaps more importantly—the views manifested by divergent narratives present in the European continent and elsewhere. This has become all the more pertinent in recent years, in view of the growing friction between Russia and its western counterparts—reaching its most critical point with the outbreak of the war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Although my focus is on the Victory Day Speeches and commemoration as a whole, they belong to the Great Patriotic War narrative and the wider Russian political order. As such, these topics often interconnect. In effect, what follows is a methodical analysis of the Speeches from 2000 to 2015 coupled with the underlying political circumstances of the period. In order to better situate the Speeches within the wider context, auxiliary documents, such as video footages of the Victory Day Parade, news coverage and blog entries<sup>40</sup> about the event are also used.

---

<sup>38</sup> Leonid Kuchma (in office 1994-2005), Viktor Yushchenko (2005-2010) and Viktor Yanukovich (2010-2014).

<sup>39</sup> Henceforth referred to simply as, respectively, "Speech at the Parade (year)" and "Speech at the Reception (year)". These documents were used in the original (Russian) and the translations were done by me. The original material can be found at the internet addresses indicated in the references.

<sup>40</sup> From livejournal, the favorite forum of the Russian internet (*runet*). In particular, I use the entries made by user *periskop* (2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2013e, 2014, 2015), a Parade enthusiast (and Soviet nostalgic) with thorough knowledge of Soviet/Russian military and their symbols.



### *3.2.2 Processing the data*

With the basic sources presented, the question is how to properly use them. As already suggested, there are no specific “recipes for action” guiding this aspect of research. Nevertheless, some considerations can be made in this regard. Howarth (2000:141) details his “basic operations” as the following:

“The analysis of empirical data involves three basic operations. These are, firstly, the 'translation' of information into textual form. This means that discourse analysts treat a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic data as 'texts' or 'writing', thus enabling them to deploy a number of techniques and methods in linguistic and literary theory commensurate with the ontological assumptions of discourse theory. The second operation consists in the application of constructed theoretical frameworks to the problematized object of investigation. As I have already noted, this involves the articulation and modification of abstract concepts and logics to a particular case. In this regard, these concepts and logics demand systematic historical specification as they are deployed. The last element involved in analysing empirical materials concerns the deployment of the various techniques of discourse analysis to the problem investigated.”

This last operation correlates to what Neumann (2008:70) calls “mapping representations”. In this procedure, the dominating representation of reality is to be elicited both by affirmation and by negation, through comparisons with possible alternative representations. As the location of a discourse by definition involves its positioning in relation to a wide range of elements outside its realm, contesting standpoints are crossed to further contextualize its momentum. To some extent, the last two operations take place simultaneously, since the analysis of a text through any technique also has a reflexive effect on the assumptions of the technique employed, such as in the “abstract concept and logics” pointed out by Howarth.

In our case, the first operation of translating our sources into analysable data is constituted by an exposition of the yearly speeches, highlighting what I consider to be the most important aspects in their articulation—concepts and ideas that represent nodal points in the discourse’s chain of signifiers. A critical perspective is implied, as the relational nature of meaning prevents a literal appraisal of a concept without conceiving of its symbolic function within the discourse—as Laclau and Mouffe (1985:111) affirm, “all discourse of fixation becomes metaphorical: literality is, in actual fact, the first of metaphors.” The second step is to investigate the logics governing the articulatory practices of these signifiers, and how this logics relates to the wider socio-political reality in Putin’s Russia. In this vein, the documents will be introduced and followed by a contextualization of the state of affairs in Russia in the year under scrutiny; by the end of each chapter, I review the elements and trends that appeared during the period analysed. With this contextualization, it will be possible to discuss the

established interpretations on the significance of the date in Russia's political configuration—i.e. the “common assumptions” regarding its political practices—with my own considerations.

Laclau's conceptualization will be useful when evaluating the dynamics of the discursive practices, namely through the logics of difference and equivalence. While one form of articulation might be dominant, more often than not discourses articulate meanings “both through the assertion of difference and the articulation of chains of equivalence” (Torfing 2005:14). Also the concept of dislocation might prove to be fruitful when looking for ruptures in the discourse, as it help in clarifying the way signifiers are linked—or not—to the main discursive articulations. Dislocations, as already mentioned, consist of events that cannot be properly symbolized in the discursive order, thus triggering shifts in its articulation—or even its collapse, in the case that the existing chains of representation completely fail in absorbing the dislocatory event(s). Furthermore, the disruptive experience reveals more acutely the social antagonisms that exist within and outside a discursive order, which helps us in defining its identity. As the investigation unfolds, different “layers” of the discourse will appear, since “not all representations are equally lasting” (Neumann 2008:73). If every discourse is fluid by its logics of dynamic articulation, the extent of this fluidity varies. A good example was already shown in the double-structure of a myth. Its atemporal dimension, even though not quite endless as a discursive practice, tends to outlive its specific historical event.

To put briefly, my analytical process consists of an investigation on how meaning is created and articulated in the Speeches in relation to the Russian social and political order of the period. With this process, my goal is to infer the general organization of the narrative at different stages—providing a “static picture” of the discourse, including its central signifiers and ramifications—and compare its development throughout the period. Finally yet importantly, I hope to be able to situate the War myth within the Russian symbolic order, and to define how this relation has evolved in the last fifteen years.

### 3.3 Final considerations in bridging the theoretical-empirical gap

As my methodological approach suggests, my final product will be a mental “map” of the state of the War myth, shedding light on its role in the wider political order of the country, and on how this relation evolved in the course of Putin-Medvedev's presidencies. Therefore, I am dealing with a discourse within other discourses. Indeed, in studying the War myth, both Russia's circumstantial political order under Putin-Medvedev and its national political identity must be taken into account. As mutually constituting system of meaning (i.e. discourses), they often intermingle in my explanation. In the theoretical conceptualization used, they are *intersubjective*; their chains of equivalences largely replicate and reinforce each other. As originally proposed by Derrida, and argued

in this work, there are no ultimate meanings clearly definable, and a sign “only means what it means” (Chandler 2007:79). Any meaningful evaluation of a discourse is applicable only by taking into account its wider context—hence, my emphasis on *relative absolutism* at the end of the previous chapter. What will remain is a schematic presentation of the myth in relation to the country’s political order. While the question of method might represent an obstacle to a rapid development of the discipline, it also opens a rather novel possibility of combining the traditional elements of a research project in a dynamic and—if conducted properly—fruitful interaction. The softening of the conventionally solidly defined borders between theory, method and practice opens the possibility of breaking through dogmatic assumptions on many of the social practices we study nowadays.

Taken in their totality, the assumptions governing discourse theory ultimately lead to the interconnectedness of all of the universe of discourse and the social practices contained in it. In this vein, there is a whole world of possibilities to which a discourse is open—the “uncertainty principle”, mentioned before, prevails. The only essential approach is to develop a critical attitude towards practices usually taken for granted, as in Barthes’ (1972) *demystification*; in other words, a “denaturalization” that provides us “that marginal gaze where things look strange enough as to present themselves as puzzles” (Neumann 2008:64). Hegemonic—or mainstream—trends of collective practices necessarily undergo a process of reification, consequently giving away their abstract aspects to artificially become solid, hard facts. This conventionalization can make the actors who perform these practices oblivious to their existence, accepting them at face value or, at best, uncritically adopting them as the normal procedure—“the way things are”. As such, a complete series of routines, procedures and habits based on a conditional set of assumptions goes unnoticed, and Neumann’s (2008:67) “processes of power” are normalized. Thus, discourse theory’s main contribution to the field of social sciences, and perhaps science in general, is to open new perspectives “either by rendering visible phenomena previously undetected by dominant theoretical approaches, or by problematizing existing accounts and articulating alternative interpretations” (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2005:320-321). The rationale driving my work is to bring to surface new elements of the debate and add considerations on the nuances of this subject. This is how theories and interpretations are refined.

The precepts of the Essex school seem to be particularly interesting in two areas of investigation on social and political practices—the dynamic “formation and dissolution of political identities”, as well as “the analysis of hegemonic practices” (Howarth 2000:136). As already pointed out, underneath the Russian official discourse on the War and its collective imaginary there is a complex, intricate interactions of signifiers, which take the form of concepts, assumptions and perspectives. Rather than dealing with the historical events of sixty years ago, the examination of this discourse can provide insights on the social and political practices in nowadays Russia. In this sense, this is the sort of

discourse where a past event is constantly rehearsed as a means to lead ongoing events, as a corpse that is twiddled as to become undead. This new “zombie” then hovers around not as an imminent, haunting event, as in Marx's spectre of communism, but as “the tradition of all dead generations[, which] weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (Marx 1852)

There is no exclusive criterion in defining the value of a research project using discourse theory, nor there is a straightforward way to conclude to which extent it successfully achieved the proposed objectives. The relevance and reliability of the outcomes are, as with most of its aspects, subjective. On that account, the final word lies within the peers and the academic community themselves:

*“The confirmation or refutation of the substantive conclusions reached by the discourse analysts depends ultimately on their persuasiveness to the community of researchers and scholars in the social sciences. These judgements will, of course, depend on the degree to which discursive accounts meet the requirements of consistency and coherence in conducting their studies, as well as the extent to which they add new and interesting insights to their various objects of investigation” (Howarth 2000:141. Italics in the original).*

Thus, instead of regarding the several distinct stages of elaborating and executing the research, an assessment of the project in its entirety provides the tools for making the “right” conclusions, based on how appropriate it resonates with the content analysed. Discourse theory is still establishing its space within the field of social sciences. In this regard, it is useful to reflect upon what discourse theory has yet to do. In order to fulfil its “unrealized potential”, Torfing (2005:25) anticipates “three important challenges” discourse theory should address:

*“1. It must demonstrate the analytical value of discourse theory in empirical studies that take us beyond the mere illustration of the arguments and concepts. [...] 2. It must address the core topics and areas within social and political science and not be content with specializing in allegedly ‘soft’ topics such as gender, ethnicity, and social movements. [...] 3. It must critically reflect upon the questions of method and research strategy. [...] We should not surrender to the positivist obsession with method that is founded on the belief that the observation of a set of methodological rules somehow guarantees the truth of the research results. However, we need to reflect, openly and critically, upon the many methodological choices that we make in the analysis of specific discursive formations.” (Italics in the original).*

This chapter was a modest attempt at dealing with the third challenge. Whereas the second challenge is subordinated to the researcher's academic preferences and inclinations, the first one presents itself as of utmost importance to the discipline, and it should be one of the main goals of any research within discourse analysis. Bearing that in mind, I humbly hope that this work will manage to provide some useful insights in expanding the analytical value of the Essex school and discourse theory as a whole.

## 4. VERIFYING MYTHICAL DISCOURSES: THE RUSSIAN CASE

In assessing the role that the VD ritual has played in Russia in the last fifteen years, I present the Victory Day celebrations since the end of the War in 1945. Besides introducing the commemorative event, I briefly present the political and social atmosphere in the Soviet Union and Russia in the period prior to the temporal scope of this research. With this, I briefly review the importance of the GPW/VD myth since its beginning, highlighting continuities and ruptures in its development up to the period of my analysis. The review then introduces the period after 2000, which I proceed to analyse year by year using the material presented in the previous chapter.

### 4.1 The Victory Day ritual in the Soviet Union

The first Victory Day was celebrated several weeks after the end of the War, on June 24, 1945. In the following year, a smaller celebration was held to mark the first anniversary of the victory. From then to the following two decades, the importance of the date only faded; already in 1947, it was demoted from holiday to an ordinary working day (Gills 2011; Tumarkin 1994). Arguably, the official goals of building socialism meant that the regime propaganda in general preferred to focus on the intrinsic Soviet axioms instead: the October Revolution; the creation of a new man in a new society; industrialization; the military, scientific and technological might of socialism—the latter embodied, in particular, by Yuri Gagarin’s first journey to outer space in 1961 (Gudkov 2005). Furthermore, and perhaps more important on the discursive level, any potential attempts to glorify the traumatic event would clash with “the uncodified, all-too-fresh and immediate personal and mass experience of the war” (ibid.). During the War, Stalin was responsible for ruthless decisions that, regardless of their effectiveness, added brutality to a conflict that already had plenty of it—the penal battalions and orders such as the one known as “no step behind”, which virtually turned many of the Soviet combatants into cannon fodder. There should be no ambiguity of interpretation about the War. As such, the leader not only forbade printing or referring to these orders, but also discouraged—if not rejected—the publication of memories of the war period, including that of high officials (Tumarkin 1994:100-110; Wydra 2007:154). Similarly, no historical research was conducted on the topic for at least a decade (Kudryashov 2010). From a safe emotional distance, the conflict was to be framed as a victorious outcome for the Soviet social system, the multinational state and its military (Gill 2011:153; Rouhier-Willoughby 2003:24; Tumarkin 1994:101).

After Stalin’s death, the control over wartime memory and its interpretation was relaxed as part of the de-Stalinization policies enacted by Nikita Khrushchev, his successor. The War narrative was

brought to the centre of the Soviet symbolic space only during the 1960s, after Leonid Brezhnev came to power—with a post-War generation “far more ready” to accept the official versions of the conflict (Ločmele, Proce & Zelče 2011:115). The Victory Day was restored on 9 May 1965, in time to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the end of the War with a military parade at the Red Square. By developing a narrative on heroism and linking it with the first post-revolutionary years, the new general secretary sought to renew the regime’s political legitimation through the Victory ceremony and, to a lesser extent, through a cult of his own personality as a war veteran<sup>41</sup> (Gill 2011; Tumarkin 1994). This not only replaced Stalin’s personal charisma with an institutionalized celebration, but also attempted to compensate for the generalized loss of enthusiasm and scepticism about the ideals of the Soviet Union at the time of *zastoy*<sup>42</sup>, a period of evident social and political stagnation. Accordingly, more commemorations were arranged on the occasion of the 50 years of the revolution in 1967, the centennial of Lenin’s birthday in 1970 and the Victory 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1975<sup>43</sup>(Tumarkin 1994:28).

Ten years later, on 9 May 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev hosted the celebrations as the new general secretary. As a grandiose event in the country’s main square, the parade served as a display of Soviet military might and unequivocal patriotism, much like during the Brezhnev years. Likewise, it was “a string of clichés” extolling the heroic liberation of Europe from fascism by the Soviets; and congratulating war veterans in a Victory that was “embodied” in people’s past, present and future (Tumarkin 1994:34). In the following year, Gorbachev started the “perestroika”, his reformist agenda of social and political openness. The disclosing of the cruel episodes of the Stalinist and Soviet rule, as well as the secret wartime agreements of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact<sup>44</sup>, provoked heated debates amid a rapidly growing atmosphere of scepticism towards the regime and its multinational state. The economic and political measures taken in the second half of the 1980s engendered a social crisis that would culminate with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. In 1990, by the of time the last Victory Day celebration took place in the Soviet state, the War narrative was inexorably tainted by the tumultuous happenings of the period, and the military parade was remarkably modest. Pictures of the period show a clear reduction in Soviet symbolism in the decoration of the Red Square in comparison to five years before (periskop<sup>45</sup> 2013e). In the official narrative, the mix of “self-pity and self-

---

<sup>41</sup> Although not taking part in any fighting, he published a small book of wartime memoirs, *Malaya zemlya*, in 1978.

<sup>42</sup> Literally, stagnation. The term refers to the long period of bureaucratic inertia in the USSR, lasting from Brezhnev’s rule until perestroika in the late 1980s.

<sup>43</sup> Surprisingly, there was no military parade on the occasion.

<sup>44</sup> The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was an agreement of non-aggression between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Although this pact was widely known, its secret protocols were only revealed in 1989. These protocols established two “areas of influence” in Eastern Europe, de facto prompting the Soviet invasion of the Baltic states and other areas before the beginning of the war, and has been a topic of much debate and political discord up to the present day.

<sup>45</sup> As this is an internet username, I decided to keep its original spelling (all in lowercase letters)

congratulation that for so long had characterized the memorization of the war” was replaced by “raw human memory” (Tumarkin 1994:188). Accordingly, Gorbachev’s speech on the eve of the Victory Day 1990 emphasized much more the tragic aspects of the War period—the suffering of incommensurable human loss backdropped by cruel state repression (idem. 196-197). The triumphal “road to victory” was moderated by considerations on the ambiguous outcome of the liberation of the Soviet land and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Gorbachev affirmed the importance of wartime lessons to be observed and followed in the present, adding to the discursive rationale a component that is central to the War narrative in modern Russia. The Soviet narrative still resonated in Gorbachev’s claim that “no one is forgotten, nothing is forgotten”, a maxim of the War cult.<sup>46</sup> And yet, the bravery of the Soviet people was perhaps the last undisputable element of a rhetoric that could no longer rely on the Party, the leader, the political system or the internationalist ideology—the Victory Day had become a “Russian” redemptive exploit.

#### 4.2 The Victory narrative amid the discursive turmoil of the 1990s

In the aftermath of perestroika, the rapid unfolding of events provoked what Ryazanova-Clarke (2008:223) calls a “fundamental shift in the symbolic order of the Russian discursive formations”. In Laclau’s terms, what occurred was a major dislocation, or rather a set of dislocations, by which “the very principles ordering society were thrown into question through a proliferation of events that could no longer be contained within it” (Norval & Mijnsen 2009:40). Whereas Gorbachev’s liberalization represented a watershed to Russia and the socialist camp as a whole, the impending collapse of the Soviet metanarrative was evident and, along with it, much of the regime’s legitimacy (Gill 2011:226). The remodelling of society meant that the common framing of reality based on the previous period dissolved at the same time that new references were still being made, and the popular enthusiasm for moving beyond the Soviet system encountered the emergence of more ambiguous, unexpected elements. With the discrediting of the principles underpinning the development of a multi-ethnic communist society under an authoritarian<sup>47</sup> political system, democratic and liberal aspirations quickly began to coexist with nationalist tendencies, as well as with growing political and economic instability throughout the region.

The struggle for power between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, the first elected president of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), illustrates the complex “conceptual

---

<sup>46</sup> These are the last lines of a 1959 poem by poet Olga Berggolts. Its words are inscribed in the Piskarevskoe memorial cemetery, built in Saint Petersburg to remember the victims of the blockade of Leningrad, as the city was known at the time of Soviet rule.

<sup>47</sup> Officially, USSR claimed to have democratic regime, although not a bourgeois one.

relationship”—both politically and symbolically—between the USSR and the Russian Federation (Forest & Johnson 2002:258). The latter eventually prevailed after Gorbachev’s resignation and the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991. However, the collapse of the Soviet system did not preclude further unpredictability and dramatic changes in every sphere of social life, intensifying the widespread feeling of “epistemological anarchy” (Wydra 2007:204). The failed communist coup attempt on August 1991, aiming at reverting the reforms started by perestroika, strengthened the growing aversion to the old regime and its symbols—the Party, Lenin and the Soviet state. Yeltsin introduced new market-oriented reforms to accelerate the transition from the centrally planned economy. These reforms came to be known collectively as a “shock therapy”, due to the radical economic changes proposed, including the privatization of the gigantic amount of state-owned property. With a background of continuing economic hardship and political fragmentation, both USSR and the present state of affairs could not offer a positive role model to the collective symbolic imaginary. Patriotism in the form of “Russianness” emerged as a convincing discursive referential at the same time that elements such as “democracy” and “liberalism” began to fall into disrepute. Whereas Tumarkin (1994:190) concludes that by 1990 the cult of the War was “manifestly finished as an institution”, already in 1991 a revival of the positive aspects of the Great Patriotic War started to occur. In a highly symbolic move representing the spirit of the time, an honour guard was established by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier<sup>48</sup>— contrasting with the removal of a similar guard from the Tomb of Lenin a couple of years before (Forest & Johnson 2002:531). After a short interval, the cult of the War was officially rehabilitated. The Victory Park in Moscow, a long-promised complex intended by Soviet authorities to honour the memory of the War, started to be constructed by Moscow’s mayor Yuri Luzhkov in a bid for popularity (Forest & Johnson 2002:532). President Yeltsin, for the same reasons, took part in the official opening of the complex’s museum on 9 May 1993. In her analysis of the media, Ryazanova-Clarke (2008) illustrates the open scepticism towards authority that pervaded this period of “heretical break” from the previous symbolic order.<sup>49</sup> In coverage that that would have been unimaginable just a few years before, the media sarcastically portrayed the president as an erratic ruler disconnected from his people—effectively, “an agent of the collapse of the historical continuity” (idem. 227). Just a few months later, in October, the prolonged constitutional crisis between the president and the parliament reached its peak with the shelling of the White House<sup>50</sup> by order of the Russian president. The standoff between the two main representatives of the democratization process was dire proof of the absence of “a national mythology” that could

---

<sup>48</sup> Another of Brezhnev’s “inventions” to cultivate the memory of the Great Patriotic War.

<sup>49</sup> From the perspective of the Essex school, that could also be called “a dislocation from the previous discursive order”.

<sup>50</sup> The Russian White House was the headquarters Russia’s legislative powers (the Congress of People’s Deputies and its Supreme Soviet).



attenuate their extreme polarization (Wydra 2002:208). As argued by Casula (2009), at the beginning of the transition a wide range of elements, or demands, had merged under the major signifier “democracy”<sup>51</sup>; as the central proposition (“abolition of the Soviet state”) was accomplished and the constitutive outside (the “other”) unifying the democratic discourse (“Communism”) vanished, the discourse quickly experienced destabilization (idem. 51).

From the perspective of discourse theory, the breakdown of the Soviet discursive order could only be followed by the proliferation of a multitude of social, political and cultural orientations, since “the more points of dislocation a structure has, the greater the expansion of the field of politics will be” (Laclau, 1990:43). In other terms, the “field of the possible” (ibid.) enlarged substantially in a relatively short period, providing more space for action and development of new identities as new events eroded the previous political configuration. A brief period of fruitful experimentation emerged with the openness of the Russian society—as in many other post-socialist countries. As such, much of the symbolic sphere consisted of “floating signifiers”, unarticulated concepts that had no implied commitment to a specific discursive structure. A good example of this bricolage is the appearance of organizations such as the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), which had neither of its proposed attributes, serving instead the purpose of dissemination of the nationalist and xenophobic ideas promoted by its leader, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Notwithstanding, the main aspirations—transition to liberal democracy and market economy—soon started to be superseded by disruptive experiences—sharp increase in crime, the effective collapse of much of the economy and public services, renewed ethnic and social tension. Accordingly, the discursive practices linking democracy and novel attitudes to the social fabric with optimism and higher standards of living were undermined.

The now established tradition of annual parades commemorating the Victory Day was introduced on 9 May 1995. On that day, the Red Square held a “historical” parade where members of the armed forces and veterans marched (periskop 2013a). In addition, a contemporary parade comprising heavy military equipment took place during the official opening of the Victory Park—it was the only time a Victory Day parade took place on that site. Even though the use of Soviet symbols was still present, by the time of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary the Victory was regarded as an unambiguously Russian achievement. The Victory Park itself includes a wide display of elements associated with Russian traditional values, in particular Orthodoxy—Saint George<sup>52</sup> is present both at the base of the main monument to the Victory and as the patron of the complex’s church, as if separating the Victory from Soviet state atheism. Church bells rang during the ceremony for the first time (ibid.). By making it a

---

<sup>51</sup> The author refers to democracy as an empty signifier within its discourse. Although I do not necessarily share his view, democracy indeed was taken for a panacea during the early stages of the transition.

<sup>52</sup> Saint symbolically associated with victory over evil, and depicted in Moscow’s coat of arms.

national celebration, the discursive practice supporting the ritual could do away with painful topics such as the non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, the purges and mass deportations promoted by Stalin and, by association, the entire Soviet system. The national focus thus provided a less controversial—if not more “humane”—narrative than that of the Soviet period (Forest & Johnson 2002:523).

Indeed, a clear “nationalistic turn” was witnessed in most, if not all, post-Soviet societies; this predisposition was an predictable outcome of the search for a source of identity detached from the previous regime, but still familiar to the collective imaginary, taking place in the post-Soviet (and post-socialist) societies. Accordingly, the search for what Ryazanova-Clarke (2008:225) calls “a new common sense” meant that while some old symbols were contested or completely disavowed, some were also co-opted by the new discursive logics (Forest & Johnson 2002). In a society that used to have principles actively and thoroughly inculcated by the state, the absence of unifying beliefs and meaningful references resulted in a painstaking process of identity formation. As far as both communist and liberal orientations were experienced as past- and present-time hardship, they could not easily provide a unifying discourse. Accordingly, there was a gradual shift from anti-Communism toward the country’s “uniqueness” and “special way” as the centre of the Russian political identity (Perovic & Casula 2009a:22). Even so, this shift did not become established until much later, and the quest for a “national idea” continued to be a constant in national debates, even as far as to become an official competition in 1996, fruitlessly promoted by Yeltsin. Arguably, the only consistent aspiration during the entire period was to achieve “normalcy”, no matter how vague its definition.

The introduction of annual celebrations of the Victory Day by the president was an effort to stimulate a stable social practice in society, contrasting with a discursive order that was contested from every direction and was, therefore, rather unpredictable. Political success depends on the extent to which a group or entity manages to correspond to, or capitalize on, general tendencies in its society and “the political” in general. The War memory was a readily available set of signifiers and, although not in the scope of my research, indeed preserved much of Yeltsin’s legitimacy under the critical circumstances of the second half of the decade. In this vein, already in his first 9 May speech<sup>53</sup> in 1996, President Yeltsin makes a direct association between the effort during the wartime period and traditional heroes of the Russian national historiography, from twelfth-century Alexander Nevsky<sup>54</sup> to Marshall Kutuzov, who led the fight against Napoleon’s invasion in 1812<sup>55</sup>. From then until the end of Yeltsin’s presidency in 1999, there was a gradual reshaping of the ceremony away from Soviet

---

<sup>53</sup> In 1995 the official speech was delivered by Pavel Gratchev, the minister of defence

<sup>54</sup> Traditionally acknowledged as the first “hero” to defend the Russian lands from foreign invaders.

<sup>55</sup> This war is the “original” Patriotic War; it is also usually referred to “Patriotic War of 1812” or “First Patriotic War”, as its meaning was overshadowed by the War that gave birth to the myth studied in this work.

symbolism. Military forms, ranks and symbols were changing back to pre-revolutionary ones, and by the end of the decade several military schools had been renamed, merged or closed—also a possible outcome of the serious economic crisis the country faced in 1998. The speeches were no longer delivered from the top of Lenin’s mausoleum, as the Soviet leaders would do, but on a dais<sup>56</sup> built in front of it. The praising of the War heroes increased and direct mentions to the USSR eventually disappeared in 1999 (periskop 2013a).

On the highest political level, the configuration of what in effect had become a strong presidentialist system—a consequence of the 1993 crisis—did not prevent centrifugal forces inside the Russian Federation from acting despite the central government. The Chechen republic in the north Caucasus, officially part of the Russian Federation, had an uncertain status since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its invasion by governmental forces in 1994 resulted in a two-year war with an ambiguous outcome for Russia, as local separatists obtained *de facto* autonomy in 1996. In the same year, Yeltsin’s arduous re-election entailed that a group loosely defined as “oligarchs”<sup>57</sup> received prerogatives of extra-legal (personal) influence on the government, causing resentment among the impoverished population. By the end of the decade, powerful governors emerged in oil-rich regions in open defiance to Yeltsin’s—and therefore federal—rule (for more on the relations between the central government and divergent forces, see Charap 2007). On the international level, the steady decline in importance of the country became a self-evident truth in 1998, when it hit its lowest point. The severe financial (and eventually economic) crisis of that year, along with NATO’s decision to carry out an intervention in Serbia even with stark opposition from Russian leadership and society at large, dissipated many assumptions of the remaining “objective” (military and economic) factors defining Russia as a strong power.

These events, in particular the situation in Chechnya, were felt acutely in the Russian national imaginary; as it became clear that the social and political chaos could degenerate into the disintegration of the country, *conservatism* became a distinctive nodal point in its symbolic order. Not by accident, one of the most popular figures of the late 1990s was Yevgeny Primakov; both as foreign affairs minister (1996-1998) and prime minister (1998-1999), Primakov defended “multipolarity” at a global level and “eurasianism” in Russia’s foreign policy as a way to consolidate the country’s “special way” of development according to its uniqueness. Likewise, Gennady Zyuganov, head of a now reformed Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), along with the already mentioned Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, also became popular politicians in the early 1990s,

---

<sup>56</sup> The platform raised during official ceremonials, where the authorities stand and deliver their pronouncements. In some languages it is also called “tribune”, or “podium”.

<sup>57</sup> The small group of “winners” during the privatization processes.

remaining so ever since.

By the end of the decade, the erratic behaviour of the Russian leadership and society seemed to recede into a more systematic pattern of values, beliefs and attitudes. On the discursive field, a distinct combination of historical Russian elements, moderated by both Soviet and post-Soviet experiences, was taking shape. The period that Forest and Johnson (2005:540) deemed the “critical juncture” for the formation of a new collective identity was settling. At the same time that a symbolic “other” was not yet being clearly defined, “normalcy” remained a privileged signifier in the social imaginary, developing a discursive structure around itself. Initially, this articulation was either defined by “negative” elements—pessimism and disapproval of the current state-of-affairs—or based on truisms—such as social security, economic stability and preservation of the cultural heritage. Soon enough, though, affirmative concepts such as “Russian” traditional values in the form of patriotism, strong statehood and the Orthodox religion<sup>58</sup> became articulated through uniqueness (the Russian “special way) and conservatism, which in turn became the backbone of the discourse on normalcy.

By the presidential elections of 2000, all the major candidates and their supporting organizations had incorporated, to varying degrees, these concepts in their party platforms, including the “atheist”, but still influential, CPRF<sup>59</sup>. The ballot was won by the incumbent head of state, Vladimir Putin; as Yeltsin resigned on the last day of 1999, the then prime minister took office as the acting president—not without first signing a declaration on “guarantees” for Yeltsin and his family. Therefore, Putin held a privileged position that certainly played an important role in his victory (the legality of which remained a disputed topic in some political circles). In any case, the new president was a virtually unknown personality just one year before, when he was appointed to the post of prime minister as a loyal supporter of Yeltsin—an important position in a cabinet that changed no less than four times in the preceding 14 months. His political insignificance is likely to have played in his favour, as the public did not associate him with the “troubled 1990s” (Perovic & Casula 2009a:21). In August 1999, Prime Minister Putin officially launched a military incursion in Chechnya after a series of bombings attributed to its rebels. In an atmosphere of terrorism paranoia, his uncompromising stance on the fighting—which was later labelled the Second Chechen War—was “highly acclaimed” by the masses and the leadership, who, in addition, saw the 1996 outcome as humiliating (Perovic & Casula 2009a:21). Indeed, the matter was shrewdly used by Putin’s administration at a time when the spectre of political fragmentation was once again looming over the country’s national imaginary.

---

<sup>58</sup> Much like the 18<sup>th</sup>-century doctrine of “Orthodoxy (*Pravoslaviye*), Autocracy (*Samoderzhaviye*) and Nationality (*Narodnost*)” sponsored by the Russian emperor Nicholas I.

<sup>59</sup> A few years later, the communist leader Zyuganov would even defend that Jesus was the first communist. (Ivan Ivanov 2011).

As the new arrangement of the discursive field was settling, the new forces in power represented—or at least were acutely aware of—its prevailing aspects. In fact, the discourse of conservatism already was articulated already during Putin’s election campaign (Prozorov 2005:124). Among his declared intentions, the president argued for the disavowal of any kind of revolution or counter-revolution, in what was deemed a “legitimist approach” (Sakwa 2010:29). The conservative momentum accepted the transition to the market system and to democracy—or at least to a polyarchic system—as a *fait accompli*, therefore endorsing most of the liberal reforms of the 1990s. As some sort of what Prozorov (2005) calls “liberal-conservative” identity, this platform provided leeway to accommodate the demands for predictability and order in a more opportune manner than under Yeltsin.

As I argued in the previous chapters, discursive structures are never fully closed entities, and the relatively high support Putin received from the start owed much to the fact that his discourse closely resembled that of the Russian political imaginary at the time. According to Sakwa (2008:216), “normality” becomes the foundation of a “distinctively Russian” model of democracy with Putin. Whereas it is impossible to calculate to what extent this is part of a conscious effort, some instances of it are clearly designed to gain the public’s approval. This is the case with several rhetorical and social practices, such as the “myth” of the Great Patriotic War. The (post-Soviet) GPW symbolism epitomized many of the axioms that were perceived as essential to a gradual achievement of—or return to—normalcy. As an intangible “asset” of Russian society, the investigation of the function of the War narrative in Russian society must begin with the annual celebration on 9 May, its concrete counterpart. I will now proceed to investigate this ritual—more precisely, its attendant presidential speeches—in depth.

### 4.3 Presidential Speeches and the Victory Day ritual after Yeltsin

The Victory Day is the last of what is sometimes called “May holidays” (*mayskie prazdniki*), which start on May 1<sup>st</sup> (Labour Day). As the first major holidays after the long winter, the population takes the opportunity to stroll around the city, and 9 May includes many outdoor events. War veterans and the general population gather at the Theatre Square, the Victory Park and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier—where a minute of silence is also held on that day. In the evening, a large set of fireworks is displayed in the skies over the Kremlin. The weather in Moscow has so far been particularly generous on 9 May, and only in four (2000, 2004, 2007, 2011) of the fifteen years analysed was the sky not a deep blue—which could also be the result of cloud seeding by the Russian Air Force.

The Victory Parade at the Red Square is broadcasted live countrywide by one of the main channels—and abroad by a few media outlets. This broadcasting is accompanied by two commentators, usually

a man and a woman (but not always), presenting the parading units and the general unfolding of the ceremony. Therefore, for a better contextualization, I also used video recordings of the ceremony. The Parade ceremonial starts at 10am, with the ringing of the Kremlin bells. Immediately thereafter, a small military company marches, displaying the Victory Banner<sup>60</sup> and the flag of the Russian Federation. After that, the Minister of Defence meets the head of the Moscow Military District, and they proceed with the official inspection of the parading troops. The Minister of Defence then reports to the President of the Russian Federation, as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, who in his turn proceeds to deliver the presidential Speech at the Parade. It tends to be a rather brief pronouncement congratulating the War veterans and the participants of the ceremony. It usually lasts between 6-7 minutes in length, but on a few occasions like the Jubilees, it lasts up to 10 minutes.

The 2000 Speech at the Parade (SP) was the first one delivered by Vladimir Putin, and included much of the practices and procedures established by his predecessors. On that account, all of the Speeches studied in the period seem to follow a basic structure. They begin with the saluting of the “comrades” in the armed forces, usually naming their ranks in an ascending fashion (soldiers, sailors, sergeants, sub-officers, officers, generals, admirals).<sup>61</sup> The president also gives a distinct salute to the “respectable” War veterans and finally to the citizens of Russia, sometimes presenting minor changes in that order. During his delivery, the head of state comments on the War and its significance nowadays. Usually, the president also addresses some contemporary issues—directly or implicitly. Invariably, the Speech ends with the leader praising the armed forces, the War veterans, the country and its people—the order and the groups praised change slightly in each Speech. Finally, the president concludes his deliverance with the exclamation “hurray” (*ura*), to which the troops reply by repeating it three times. After that, a military band performs the Anthem of the Russian Federation (sometimes only instrumental, sometimes a capella, sometimes with both instruments and vocals). Finally, the Parade itself starts, taking a little less than one hour for all the units to march through the Red Square, along with military bands playing songs of the Soviet and the Russian Armed Forces.

The Speeches at the Reception (SR) take place in the evening at the opening of the gala reception held inside the Kremlin State Palace. During the event, a banquet dinner is offered to the War veterans, the higher members of the Russian government and foreign guests; representatives of the media are also present at the occasion. Arguably, the president’s pronouncements during the reception have a more intimate, if not less formal, style. Instead of “respectable”, the audience is often addressed as “dear”. These Speeches finish with a symbolic toast in honour to Russia and its people, to the

---

<sup>60</sup> The flag which was *folklorically* displayed at the top of the Reichstag, after the capture of Berlin in 1945.

<sup>61</sup> Using an example from 2000: “Товарищи солдаты и матросы, сержанты и старшины, товарищи офицеры, генералы, адмиралы, уважаемые ветераны, граждане России!”. As it has been noticed (Wood 2011), this is the same opening used by Stalin during a speech in 1947, apart from the references to “veterans” and “citizens of Russia”.

Victory, to the veterans' health and, on occasion, to the army, to humankind's future and to its freedom. Unlike the Speeches of the Parade, these are not available in the Kremlin's official website for two occasions (2006-2007), and another has only a short press release (2011).

As explained in the methodology section, my analytical procedure consists of an initial, faithful reading, and then an evaluation using the theoretical tools presented. Moreover, I present some social and political events in the period between the annual holidays, using supportive documents and making comparisons with the Speeches when appropriate. By the end of each chapter, I try to provide a more comprehensive account of the Speeches and their development during the presidential term analysed.<sup>62</sup> The separation by presidential terms is for practical purposes, rather than an attempt at a categorization according to different discursive practices and political orientations—even though that is the case to some extent.

The statements analysed are present in the footnotes in Cyrillic, so that the reader can compare my interpretation with the original. In order to preserve the accuracy and overall contextualization, I made an effort to keep the footnotes as close to the quotations as possible, and to reproduce the statements in their entirety—sometimes resulting in long footnotes. I mention the specific Speech I am commenting on already at its beginning, so that the reader may know that the following footnotes refer to the Speech under consideration, up to the point at which I move to the next Speech. With this, I avoid the need to repeat the source on each footnote. Although the footnotes always quote the original excerpt in Russian, when highlighting specific words in the body text I transliterate them, thus causing no loss in understanding to the reader unfamiliar with the Cyrillic alphabet. When using supporting material in the middle of the analysis (i.e. not a Speech), I keep the usual in-line parenthetical citation; therefore, “*ibid/idem.*” will always refer to the previous in-line citation, and not to the document (Speech) being analysed. Although I present the title of the Speeches at length the first time, I often abbreviate the names when referring to previous Speeches in the middle of the analysis. Finally, sometimes I highlight parts of the quotes by putting them in italics; this emphasis is always mine, as the transcripts themselves have no marks in their content.

#### *4.3.1 Putin's first term (2000-2003)*

The 2000 Victory Day Speeches were some of the first important public appearances of Putin since

---

<sup>62</sup> The years are approximate, as the president takes office in the middle of a given year, in May. Accordingly, when assessing the period between 2000-2003, Putin's first term, the first months of 2004 are also implied.

he took office in May 2000. It is worth noticing that on 9 May of the previous year, the leader was not among the top echelons of the government, nor in the Parade's official dais. It was a remarkable date in that it commemorated the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the War amid the outset of a new one, this time in Chechnya. The president, who officially started his presidential term just two days before, was perceivably anxious, even as the former president was standing by his side, as if to emphasize the legitimacy of his successor (periskop 2013b). The new president apparently also forgot to shake hands with the Minister of Defence after his inspection of the parading troops (Stanislav Derkachev 2011f). In the **Speech at the Parade (2000)**, the president equates Soviet and Russian patriots, placing the veterans "in the same ranks with the new generation of defenders of the motherland".<sup>63</sup> It is worth noticing that this is the last year that the veterans actually paraded on the Red Square, even if not with the vigour and discipline of their younger counterparts (periskop 2013b). Moreover, the president emphasizes the "habit of winning" of the nation and its people, including in times of peace, which helps "our generation" in fostering the "Russian values of democracy and freedom" as well as those of "economic strength and social well-being"<sup>64</sup>. He also gives a special greeting to the "fraternal countries" of the contemporary Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)<sup>65</sup>, with whom they "defended peace" and "protected the big Soviet country" in the struggle of the Soviet people for the "common victory"<sup>66</sup>. Unlike in the previous parades, veterans from 11 of the other former socialist republics also paraded for the first time (idem.). The last remarkable aspect of the speech is the declaration that the War memory will remain "a warning to those that consider terror and violence [to be] their main weapon"<sup>67</sup>. In this sense, Putin continues the tradition established by Gorbachev of connecting a wartime lesson to the contemporary world.

The second speech of the day, as already mentioned, tends to take on a more intimate tone; it is addressed to a selected group of war veterans and political figures. After a brief introduction on the importance of the date, the **Speech at the Reception (2000)** gives a laudatory, slightly flowery account of the human virtues and exploits prompted by "four years of the hardest war, four years of deprivation and loss. But [also] four years of struggle, *faith in oneself and the victory*". Next, Putin

---

<sup>63</sup> "Сегодня вы в одном строю с новым поколением защитников Родины"

<sup>64</sup> "[...]с вами мы привыкли побеждать. [...] Еще не раз она выручит в мирной жизни, поможет нашему поколению выстроить сильную, процветающую страну, высоко поднимет российское знамя демократии и свободы. [...] знаем, что мир – это, прежде всего, прочность экономики и благополучие людей."

<sup>65</sup> An organization formed by the former Soviet republics after the breakup of the Soviet Union. As of 2015, it had nine full member states.

<sup>66</sup> "День Победы вместе с нами отмечают в государствах Содружества, и я сердечно приветствую ветеранов братских стран. Порох победы и радость победы у нас одна на всех. Мы вместе отстояли мир, не дали перекроить историю, защитили большую советскую Родину [...] В ваших руках славное знамя общей Победы."

<sup>67</sup> "[...] но память о Великой Отечественной так же будет напутствием всем живущим и предупреждением – предупреждением тем, кто считает террор и насилие своим главным оружием"



turns to the veterans, “you have not only destroyed the enemy and won. You lifted up a devastated country”<sup>68</sup>. Hence, the War narrative shows its opposite (perhaps secondary) trope: that of suffering. Indeed, the triumphalist Great Victory coexists with a constant and painstaking effort towards the successful outcome. The “faith in the victory” grants a metaphysical aspect to the account—and possibly an element of Orthodoxy in an increasingly religious Russia. Finally, one cannot overlook the assumption that the Victory was a conscious, individual effort—to some extent an anachronism, as it implies a drive toward a specific political outcome in a period when the most urgent issue was probably survival.

When referring to the earlier Parade, Putin recalls the “brotherly” effort of the warriors of different republics in “the legendary Soviet Army”, regarding it as a unifying factor in a “common *national* memory”<sup>69</sup>. It is interesting how the president uses the word “national” to refer to a country that does not exist anymore; this is also embedded in the prevalent definition of the former Soviet countries as “near abroad”<sup>70</sup>, therefore denoting something on the outside, but not properly foreign. At the same time, the “Russianness” of the efforts is also present, when the president affirms that “it is not possible to measure [how great it was] what your [veterans’] generation did *for Russia* [...] each boy knows about [the battle of] Stalingrad [...] essentially, every family has its [War] heroes”<sup>71</sup>. As during the Speech at the Parade, the president associates individual and national symbolic valour throughout generations, which confers a distinctly patriotic tone to the commemoration. At the same time, the account comes with a “cosmopolitan” view of the Soviet state and its population. As the commander-in-Chief, Putin exhorts the veterans and military in general to be ready for the great parade commemorating 60 years since the end of the War, to take place in 2005<sup>72</sup>. With the GPW narrative already an important aspect of Russian post-Soviet identity, the five-year notice given on his very first VD speech is a good indication of the importance of the ceremony for the new leader. Finally, the leader exalts the “immortal” Russian patriotism, linking its soldiers with those that survived “the harsh 1941” and “the victorious 1945”.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> “4 года самой трудной войны, 4 года лишений и потерь. Но 4 года борьбы и веры в себя и в победу. Вы не только уничтожили врага и победили. Вы подняли разоренную страну”

<sup>69</sup> “Только что ветераны легендарной Советской Армии прошли в одном строю вместе со своими однополчанами, вместе со своими боевыми друзьями из братских стран Содружества. Ваша дружба, ваше боевое братство помогают не только вам. Они и по сей день объединяют наши народы. Питают общую национальную память.”

<sup>70</sup> In Russian, *ближнее зарубежье*

<sup>71</sup> “[...] не измерить всего, что сделало ваше поколение для России [...] каждый мальчишка в России знает о Сталинграде, знает о Курской дуге. По сути, в каждой семье есть свои герои.”

<sup>72</sup> “И как Верховный Главнокомандующий ставлю ветеранам задачу: всем ветеранам – и тем, кто сегодня был на Красной площади, и тем, кого сегодня не было, всем готовиться к следующему параду, юбилейному параду по случаю шестидесятилетия Победы.”

<sup>73</sup> “Бессмертна гордость народная и русский патриотизм. И потому никакая сила не может победить русское оружие, сломить армию. Армию, в славной истории которой Брестская крепость и непокоренный Ленинград, суровый 41-й год и победный год 45-й. И теперь уже и бесчисленные подвиги солдат новой России.”

Just a few months later, the new president would face his first big challenge when the nuclear submarine Kursk sank in August, killing the whole crew of 118 sailors and officers. The president's delay in reacting to the tragedy became the target of much criticism. In that same month, the Orthodox Church canonized the Tsar Nicholas II and his imperial family. The rehabilitation of the memory of those that embodied the antithesis of the revolutionary ideals of 1917 was not uncontroversial, though it showed the country's growing disposition to come to terms with its past, or at least with its remote past. In the same vein, but in the opposite sense, a contemporized anthem was approved in December, consisting of the melody of the Soviet anthem with new lyrics. In what can only be regarded as a corollary of this "syncretic impetus", in that same month the Imperial coat of arms and the Republican tricolour flag became official symbols of the country. Even if these symbols were already in use by the government, these measures corroborate that the relation between the liberal-conservative discourse and the communist past was "unproblematic" (Prozorov 2005:129).

In 2001, the Chechen War<sup>74</sup> entered its third year, becoming part of the country's daily life through media coverage and official statements; at the same time, the fall of the space station Mir was a bitter event to many. Even though it was a planned de-orbit, it still somehow reflected the downfall of Soviet/Russian scientific achievement. Given the prevailing attitude at the time of pessimism in the face of uncertainty, these events are likely to have further strengthened the symbolic value of stability in Russian political discourse.

Like the Soviet satellite and its legacy, this year's parade revealed at least two examples indicating the end of some of the processes of transition towards a "new" Russia. First, Yeltsin was not standing among the country's leaders anymore, which seemed to match with a more collected, confident Putin. Furthermore, for the first time, all of the former USSR Marshalls are wearing the Russian—instead of the Soviet—military uniform (periskop 2013b). Finally, for the first time, the parading troops are, this year, inspected by a civilian minister of defence, as demonstrated by his civilian clothing (Stanislav Derkachev 2011c).

At the beginning of the **Speech at the Parade (2001)**, Putin stresses the "holy duty" of protecting the survivors of the war years, alluding to the wider call for safety and stability of the social fabric.<sup>75</sup> In reflecting upon the wartime conditions and the "cost" of the Victory, the president hints at the conflicting feelings that arise during what he calls a "celebration with tears in the eyes[, where] greatness and sorrow merged forever"<sup>76</sup>. At first, this antithetical construction highlights the contrast

---

<sup>74</sup> When referring to this in Putin's context, it implies the *second* Chechen war.

<sup>75</sup> "Год от года мы с большим волнением чествуем поколение победителей. И наш священный долг – заботиться и оберегать солдат и тружеников тыла тех грозных военных времен."

<sup>76</sup> "Воистину 9 мая – «праздник со слезами на глазах». В нем навсегда слились величие и печаль"

of the two main tropes of the War discourse. Nonetheless, Putin seems to dispel the apparent contradiction by matching both signifiers under a common quality of solemnity; what initially was a conflicting interaction becomes one of complementarity, with its parts mutually reinforcing the main narrative. The collective effort during the War surpasses spatial and temporal barriers, since the “national cohesion” heralded the global fight against fascism; common symbols, such as the red banner of the Armed Forces, keep this memory alive through the years.<sup>77</sup>

Putin claims that the victory in “the fairest war of the twentieth century, the liberating war for sovereignty and independence of the Motherland” serves as a warning that “complicity with violence and extremism leads to terrible tragedies”, reproducing the previous warnings on terror and violence.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, it hints at international politics when considering that “[one] cannot build a safe world only for oneself, let alone at the others’ expense”<sup>79</sup>. In this sense, the War memory also demands concrete action; passivity may lead to undesired outcomes, and cooperation must be the base for a safe world. The claim that “to be [the Victory’s] inheritors is not only a high honour, but first of all responsibility” is emblematic<sup>80</sup>.

Finally, the president reiterates the holy duty mentioned at the beginning, stating that the symbolic “capital” obtained with the Victory still works as inspiration for the Russian people to overcome obstacles and prompt them to “new heights of victory”<sup>81</sup>. Finally, it is also representative of the fading of the old system the fact that in this year’s Speech there are no references to the Soviet Union and the Soviet Army (periskop 2013b).

Later, Putin starts the **Speech at the Reception (2001)** by addressing those “who saved our Motherland and the world from the ‘brown plague’”<sup>82</sup>. Two terms here deserve a clarification: while *rodina* can be translated as Motherland, in the present context it can mean both the “Russian nation” and the “Soviet Union”. More interesting is the term “brown plague”, a derogatory term for Nazi-fascism or extreme nationalism in general. This association with the colour brown is already well consolidated in the Russian political arena<sup>83</sup>.

---

<sup>77</sup> “У нашего народа были такие единство и воля, что этой силой был поднят на борьбу с фашизмом весь мир [...] В наши дни – как и в те военные годы – красное знамя Вооруженных Сил снова в строю”

<sup>78</sup> “Мы победили в самой справедливой войне XX века, в войне освободительной – за суверенитет и независимость Родины [...] [Её уроки] предупреждают, что пособничество насилию и экстремизму ведет к страшным трагедиям”

<sup>79</sup> “Весь опыт послевоенной истории говорит: нельзя построить безопасный мир только для себя, а тем более – в ущерб другим.”

<sup>80</sup> “Быть ее [Победы] наследниками – не только высокая честь, это прежде всего ответственность.”

<sup>81</sup> “И капитал завоеванной ими Победы служит нам и поныне, помогает преодолевать трудности и идти вперед, обязывает к новым делам, к новым победным высотам.”

<sup>82</sup> “[...] кто спас нашу Родину и мир от коричневой чумы”

<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the first years of Yeltsin’s rule faced strong nationalistic and communist opposition, labeled by government supporters as the “red-browns” (*красно-коричневые*).

The president identifies a progressive sense of commitment to the celebration, which each year unifies the Russian people, “strengthens its soul” and “gives faith in our country”<sup>84</sup>. As such, he implies the importance of keeping the symbolism and seeking inspiration in what will remain “the most expensive, most bright and most remembered holiday of Russia”<sup>85</sup>. Victory, therefore, represents a moral triumph of the nation and its people. It suggests a common lesson, a certain principle governing daily practice. As Putin said earlier at the parade, this means maintaining the world’s “strategic stability”, in particular by not allowing the spread of local conflicts, which “give birth to big wars”<sup>86</sup>—thus implying the urgent need to “contain” Chechen separatists.

On September 11, the attacks orchestrated by Islamic radicals against the United States of America (USA) represented a watershed moment in international politics. In Russia, the event was immediately associated with the conflict in Chechnya, and Putin reportedly was the first head of state to contact his American counterpart to give his condolences. The similarities abounded in these attacks, both in the methods used by the radical groups and in the blurred lines separating them from the rest of Muslim world—at least in the worldview of terrified and, as a result, increasingly belligerent leaderships in Washington and Moscow. Indeed, as the United States declared Russia to be its most important ally on the global counter-offensive against terrorist groups, the Russian elite saw itself in a “neo-Soviet” fashion, hoping to revive the Cold War framework in which two equally powerful poles would settle global security issues by themselves (Hopf 2009:4). Regardless of the shape it would take, the country’s elite saw the joint effort as a fortunate occasion for a rapprochement between the two countries.

Against this background, the **Speech at the Parade (2002)** has a slightly different approach, as it shifts the focus from the emotions evoked by the commemoration to a more explicit commentary on the enemy and its behaviour. After his initial greeting, the president reminds his audience of the “righteous war” and its “great Victory”, which was achieved at a high cost by the veterans, who “rid the world of fear and gave it a future”.<sup>87</sup> He then mentions some important events of the fight against Nazi troops, such as the battles near Moscow, in Stalingrad and in Kursk, leading up to the enemy’s defeat “in his own lair”.<sup>88</sup> The enemy here is Nazism, or fascism as a whole. As with the “plague”

---

<sup>84</sup> “Год от года растет его [дня 9 мая 1945-го года] объединяющая сила. [...] возвышает наш народ, укрепляет его дух [...]. Он дает нам веру в свою страну.”

<sup>85</sup> “Этот праздник остается самым дорогим, самым светлым и самым памятным в России.”

<sup>86</sup> “Сегодня наша главная обязанность – хранить стратегическую стабильность в мире, не допустить расползания локальных конфликтов – конфликтов, из которых рождаются большие войны.”

<sup>87</sup> “Уже 57 лет отделяют нас от дня окончания праведной войны и Великой Победы. Но эта победа далась нам страшной ценой – ценой жизни наших отцов и дедов [...] [они] избавили от страха мир и подарили ему будущее”

<sup>88</sup> “В 41-м мы остановили его здесь, под Москвой. В 43-м – сломали хребет под Сталинградом и Курском. В 45-м – добились его в собственном логове.”

mentioned in the previous Speech at the Reception, it is once more devoid of any trace of humanity—this time, as a being that inhabits a lair or a den. Moreover, Putin equates the “old” enemy with new ones, as “the forces of evil and violence [...] now have new names, but old habits. [...] At any moment they can become as dangerous as Nazism”<sup>89</sup>. The discourse progresses from vague warnings to a tangible sense of menace, while underscoring the memory of those days as a lesson about the present threat. Therefore, “international inertia and unjustified leniency only helped fascism to grow stronger [...] the only way to counter these threats is through the union of efforts of countries and the will of their people. [...] We again unite against our common threat. Its name is *terrorism*”. Two distinct entities—the Nazi and the terrorists—are articulated into a common concept of existential threat under a logic of equivalence; the “habits” mentioned before function as the main element linking an emerging challenge with a historical one, whereas other elements—such as their historical and ideological context—are downplayed. The rhetoric against inertia suggests the “moral failure of appeasement”, a recurrent argument in post-War politics, also used in defence of humanitarian intervention (Bell 2006:16)

As already mentioned, this was the first Victory celebration after the September 11 attacks took place in the United States, and the urge to combat “terrorism” had gathered momentum in the international agenda of several countries. The link with the Nazi invaders not only intensified the perception of terrorism as the single most dangerous threat to modern Russia, but also provided for renewed possibility of cooperation with the European continent and North America against a common enemy, akin to that of the War years. In this vein, it is interesting to note the initial praise of the Soviet veteran, not only as fighting for their own freedom but also for the “independence of other nations”<sup>90</sup>. The War and its memory play a special role in bringing different nations together. Putin argues that the present situation urges the Russian people to act, and to show cohesion and love for the country as they did in those years.<sup>91</sup>

During the **Speech at the Reception (2002)**, Putin uses a more assertive tone in dealing with the state-of-affairs of the country and the significance of the Victory celebration. When referring to a terrorist bombing that occurred in Kaspiysk earlier on that day, Putin calls the culprits “scumbags, to whom nothing is sacred”<sup>92</sup>. The explosion happened during the city’s military parade, in conspicuous

---

<sup>89</sup> “Силы зла и насилия вновь и вновь возникают на земле. У них сегодня иные имена, но старые повадки. [...] в любую минуту они могут стать столь же опасными, как и нацизм.”

<sup>90</sup> “Приветствую всех, кто самоотверженно боролся за эту Победу, боролся на фронте и в тылу, сражался за свою Родину, за свободу и независимость других народов.”

<sup>91</sup> “Время требует поступков и от нас. Мы должны честно работать, уважать и себя, и свою Родину. [...] Такое же единство нужно нам в мирной жизни и сегодня. В этом залог достойного будущего России.”

<sup>92</sup> “Но даже сегодня во время празднования в Каспийске прогремел взрыв. [...] И это преступление сегодня совершили подонки, для которых нет ничего святого.”

defiance to the government's authority and its symbols. With this perspective, the president equates terrorists with the Nazis, "just as dangerous, inhumane and bloody (murderous)", reminding people of the War order to "crush the vermin"<sup>93</sup>. This harsh condemnation and the vulgar wording employed reflect not only the more reserved (and perhaps less formal) setting where the Speech takes place, but also aims at persuading the audience of the gravity of the threat. At a moment when terrorism is a sensible topic worldwide, the war in Chechnya provides the president with moral authority in leading the fight against international terrorism—hence, his outspoken attitude. Warning against "disunity" in facing global threats, as in the early years of the War, Putin envisions a solid coalition of allies against the common threat, like the one that led the Allies to the celebrated Victory.<sup>94</sup>

Framing the separatist conflict in the Caucasus within the emerging menace of terrorism at a global level proved effective. Whereas the campaign on Chechnya was often criticized at international fora, the novel circumstances after the 9/11 attacks suddenly opened new possibilities for cooperation between Russia and the United States to an extent unimaginable after the conflict in Serbia in 1998. For the first time since then, the articulation around "normalization" could draw an important element back within its range—the international prestige of being a major player or a "great power".

Cooperation plans aside, the threat posed by terrorist acts was mainly a domestic issue in the Russian Federation, and continued to be a major challenge for the country and its political leadership. In October of that year, 40 Chechen fighters took more than 800 people hostage in a theatre in Moscow. The crisis ended three days later with the Russian Special Forces storming the building, which resulted in over 100 casualties aside from the terrorists. Notwithstanding the recklessness of the government's reaction, the operation received support from many sectors of Russian society, some hoping that the uncompromisingly confrontational policy towards the rebels would end the conflict. The Russian offensive in Chechnya continued until March 2003, when the pro-Moscow government adopted a new constitution for the Chechen republic, gaining control over much of its territory; nevertheless, the conflict would continue for several years with guerrilla warfare.

In the international arena, the Russian prospect of a strategic partnership evaporated with the same readiness with which it had first appeared. If the 2001 intervention in Afghanistan met no resistance from the Russian leadership, the same could not be said about the proposal of overthrowing Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq two years later. The United State was determined in sending troops to that country, based on questionable allegations that it was concealing weapons of mass destruction and,

---

<sup>93</sup> "[...] терроризм сродни нацизму: так же опасен, так же бесчеловечен и так же кровав [...] люди шли на войну, помня о призыве: «Раздави гадину!»." The word *гадина* (*gadina*) literally means "reptile".

<sup>94</sup> "[...] что разгром нацизма дался миру миллионами человеческих жертв, гибелью городов, разрушением целых государств. И эта цена – результат разобщенности стран, которые не сумели вовремя объединиться и оценить всеобщую опасность миру. Прочная коалиция союзников стала последним ударом по фашизму."

on that account, sponsoring terrorism. Putin and the Russian leadership considered the move an attempt to promote regime change motivated by geopolitical considerations, and only marginally related to international terrorism, if at all. The “unilateral disregard of Russia’s interests” by the American leadership in this and other stances ended the “neo-Soviet” standpoint of the Russian leadership, along with its universalist pretensions (Hopf 2009:4). Nonetheless, the same did not happen to the broader collective imaginary. The signifier “great power”, once back to its traditional association with “Russianness”, and to a lesser extent “stability”, remained a central element of the articulation on “normalcy” in Russian national consciousness—and also brought renewed emphasis on its “uniqueness”. Therefore, “great power” was to be assessed independently from, or in spite of, its western counterparts.

Accordingly, the national pursuit of “stable” references from history increasingly became a more concrete attempt at emulating past practices. Inasmuch as it could be regarded as another aspect of the “normal” development of things, Russian society has sought legitimacy in its inherited political might and international prestige. Some of the remarks made by 2003’s 9 May Parade commentators are illustrative. Not only do they mention the “simplification” of the annual ritual, probably in reference to the discontinuation of Soviet symbolism, but they also remark on the absence of heavy machinery on the Red Square, even though that has been the case since the Soviet VD Parade of 1990—perhaps foreshadowing the reestablishment of this practice a few years later. Furthermore, the commentators declare this year that one of the functions of the Parade is to demonstrate the country’s military power and defence readiness (Stanislav Derkachev 2011e). This stands in clear contrast with the commentaries made during the Parades held in the late 1990s—in particular that of 1997, when the commentator explicitly rejected the idea that the parade served as a display of military might (periskop 2013a; periskop 2013b).

From the very beginning, the **Speech at the Parade (2003)** praises the efforts of those who tread “the terrible, but victorious path” of saving its homeland and liberating other countries. The “heroic victory” was achieved as “the mighty Wehrmacht [war] machine was stopped”, and “the strong, arrogant and ruthless enemy” was crushed, even though he had subdued all of Europe, assured of his “success”. In a crescendo of *epicness*, Putin concludes that this critical point took place “here – in our land”. It is noteworthy that the president labels the enemy’s possible conquest as a *success*; the word *victory* is thus exclusively reserved for the Great Patriotic War—which he describes as a period of “fearlessness”, “strengthening of the soul” and “the triumph of honour”.<sup>95</sup> As during SP 2000, this

---

<sup>95</sup>“Сегодня мы чествуем и вспоминаем тех, [...] кто прошел тяжелый и страшный, но победный путь, кто выстоял и отбросил фашистов от границ Отечества. Освободил другие страны [...] 58 лет назад была одержана эта героическая Победа. Была остановлена мощная машина вермахта, уничтожен сильный, надменный и безжалостный враг. Враг, который не сомневался в успехе и уже покорил всю Европу. Но был сломлен.

year's Speech also mentions the role of "all the nations of the multinational Soviet Union" in this effort, adding that "all the brother countries from the Community of Independent States celebrate their veterans today". After an absence of two years, CIS countries are back to the main narrative. All the fighters of the Soviet land shared "one purpose – crush the enemy, return home and raise the country from the ruins and ashes."<sup>96</sup> Akin to SR 2000, the War outcome comes up as a conscious intention in the mind of its participants.

This time, the president discusses the "lessons" of the War at length, elaborating on the need to remember "why the fascists appropriated the right to decide the destiny of the world [...] [as they] imagined themselves the creators of history and expected to remain unpunished". At the same time, he again identifies "inertia and omission" as the main political mistakes allowing the conflict to take place. This time, instead of addressing the historical cohesion of the Soviet people, Putin envisions the cohesion of "civilized countries" against the new serious and global menace of international terrorism. Therefore, the War is to be emulated to once again overcome a time of tribulation.<sup>97</sup>

Later, during the **Speech at the Reception (2003)**, the president is enthusiastic in praising the date as the "sacred holiday, the day the bloodiest War ended". It marks the moment "our people" triumphed "over barbarism and violence" and "the greatest justice in the world's history came true".<sup>98</sup> Putin continues with the exultant tone, claiming that those who survived the "unbearable hardships" of the War set an example of "faith, unity and pursuit towards the best", which is needed even today. Yet current problems, the narrative goes, while complex, "are not comparable with those of the War period. We can and must solve them".<sup>99</sup> Putin has confidence in the veterans, who, as survivors of the heroic saga, know the "whole truth" of the War—the meaning of "real friendship", as well as the memory of those who did not survive it. He then finishes his pronouncement by attributing the victory

---

Сломлен здесь – на нашей с вами земле [...] Великая Отечественная – это эпоха бесстрашия. Это время подвигов, время укрепления духа и торжества чести."

<sup>96</sup> "Все народы многонационального Советского Союза внесли свой вклад в общую копилку Победы. И потому сегодня во всех братских странах Содружества Независимых Государств поздравляют ветеранов-победителей. [...] Тогда была лишь одна цель – разгромить врага, вернуться домой и поднять из руин и пепла страну."

<sup>97</sup> "В эти дни мы обращаемся к урокам войны. Мы обязаны помнить, как она начиналась, и не вправе забывать, почему фашисты присвоили себе право решать судьбы мира, судьбы других стран и народов, почему возомнили себя творцами истории и надеялись остаться безнаказанными [...] Выжидание и бездействие международного сообщества позволили нацистам вести себя агрессивно и нагло. [...] Именно сплоченность помогла победить фашизм. Этот поистине бесценный опыт единства нужен и в наши дни. В мире появилась новая глобальная и очень серьезная опасность – международный терроризм. Для противодействия ему надо соединить усилия всех цивилизованных стран."

<sup>98</sup> "Сегодня мы отмечаем священный праздник – день окончания самой кровопролитной войны [...] 9 мая 45-го наш народ одержал победу над варварством и насилием. Над страхом и болью. И в этот день свершилась величайшая справедливость в мировой истории."

<sup>99</sup> "Наши отцы и деды преодолели невыносимые тяготы и испытания. Их опыт веры, единства и стремление к лучшему как никогда нужны нам сегодня. Перед нами еще немало сложных проблем. Но это проблемы мирной жизни. Они несравнимы с военными. Мы можем и обязаны их решить."



over the enemy to the veterans' "stoicism, patience and great love of the country", virtues that should help the people today "in the construction of the new Russia".<sup>100</sup> In regards to the positive role "patience" plays on the personal level, it is worthwhile to compare it with the categorical reprimand on "inertia" and "omission" as factors leading to tragedies, as stated in the earlier Speech.

Given the circumstances, it is surprising that this Speech makes no mention of terrorism; moreover, it stands in stark contrast to the statements made in the previous year, when attacks were carried out during a 9 May parade. Overall, the intimate nature of this presidential address coexists with a didactic—if not moralistic—undertone, raising the attributes of the wartime struggle to the status of dogma; as in Lincoln's (1989) definition of a myth, it conveys not only truth, but also *paradigmatic* truth. In this vein, the tale of a victim who becomes a winner, in this case collectively represented by the Soviet people, serves as a source of inspiration for the practices that govern everyday life in Russia. Nevertheless, the present-time hardships faced across the country should not be equated with the ones of that period, as the "truth" of the War remains ultimately incomprehensible to those who did not experience it first-hand.

Later that year, the unofficial war Putin waged against the structure of powers that existed parallel to, or despite of, the central government, was coming to a critical point. Since the beginning of his office, the president condemned what he saw as excessive influence of regional and economic elites on the government. In regards to the first, the new government conducted a series of reforms—changes in the mechanism of election of members of the upper house; the creation of federal districts directly subordinated to the president—which considerably reduced the power of the governors. Concerning the second group—loosely defined as "oligarchs"—the measures taken were much more controversial. Already in 2000, the president took over two national TV outlets owned by influential magnates, in a move that signalled to the economic elite that it should stay out of politically sensible activities, such as mass media. In 2003, the government started to harass Mikhail Khodorkovsky, owner of the oil company Yukos. The government opened a case on fraud and tax evasion against the oligarch; as Khodorkovsky had political aspirations for the presidential elections of 2004, the criminal case and eventual arrest were widely regarded as politically motivated. In fact, whereas most of the initiatives executed during the power struggle were not technically illegal, their execution often included a selective application of the law—a condition that Sakwa (2010:18) calls "paraconstitucionalism" or "dual state". Nonetheless, with these manoeuvres, the president managed to curb the political influence of the oligarchs at the same time that it regained control of key sectors

---

<sup>100</sup> "Вы знаете всю правду войны. Знаете, что значит настоящая дружба и надежное плечо товарища. Помните тех, кто пал на поле битвы. Кто замучен в концлагерях, погиб от холода и ранений. [...] Тогда, в 45-м, вам помогли одолеть врага стойкость, терпение и великая любовь к Отечеству. Пусть они сопутствуют всем нам и сегодня в строительстве новой России."

of the economy (Perovic & Casula 2009a:19). Interestingly enough, this state of affairs did not face substantial disapproval in public opinion. They were not in conflict with the central demand of stability and, in general, the public approved of the professed “dictatorship of the law” proposed at the beginning of the presidency (Putin 2000). Even the concentration, or verticalization, of power, was likely to be perceived in a positive way, as political polarization was strongly associated with the uncertainty of the 1990s. Under the banner of “conservatism”, the president could present himself as an arbiter, a “new” force standing beyond the confrontation between a nationalist left and a liberal right (Prozorov 2005:124). In the legislative elections of 2003, the officially supported party, United Russia, obtained a little more than one third of the seats in the Duma, making it the largest party in the country.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a “neutral” custom such as the commemoration of the Great Patriotic War could be a particularly important tool for building consensus. At the same time, there were no guidelines as to how this could be achieved. Despite the clear importance Putin personally attributed to the date, the frequent reordering of the parading troops and its symbols (the Russian flag, the Victory banner) gives the feeling that the organizers were sometimes “experimenting” with the ceremony (periskop 2013b). Something similar occurred to the use of Soviet symbology. It was evident that the politically motivated art designed to stimulate civic activism—also known as *agitprop*—had vanished with the old regime. Even so, in 2000, the parading military institutions were still “completely dominated” by Soviet symbols and banners (ibid). The retiring of these elements occurred gradually, in an unsystematic process. To a large degree, it reflected the ongoing reorganization of the remainders of the Soviet past in the military institutions—such as their renaming, mergers and closures.

Putin, in contrast to his predecessor, used laudatory words from the beginning (SP 2000) when referring to the communist period, the “big” Soviet country and the “legendary” Soviet army. This being said, the explicit mention of its role on the War account does not seem to follow a specific pattern. In 2001, there were no references to anything “Soviet”; by contrast, Putin mentions the “Soviet people” and its exploits twice at the Speech at the Reception (2002) and mentions the Soviet Union when addressing the CIS countries at the Speech at the Parade (2003).

Since Yeltsin left office, or even before that, several elements that were co-opted by competing discursive practices in a disorderly fashion, slowly started to stabilize. To a certain degree, the emerging order around “normalcy” was a natural reaction of a society lost in transition, weary from successive vicissitudes. At some point, this order gathered such importance as to be assimilated by the country’s leadership. This helps explain the swift actions taken by Putin as soon as he came to

power, in pursuit of governability and restoration of country's national pride. It is beyond dispute that a steep increase in the inflow of petrodollars, the revenue made by the country's oil exports, provided the government with the means to enact its policies. Whereas direct confrontation attracted much attention in the President's struggle for power, the fortuitous availability of a considerable amount of resources aided this pursuit in a much subtler (and possibly more effective) manner—the “rent distribution to various elite factions” (Perovic & Casula 2009a:22). In practice, this was the tolerated equivalent of bribery. In this respect, this course of action often came along with a clear disregard, if not dismissal, of many of the rules and procedures established in the transition to a liberal democratic society with a market economy. Regardless of the assessment made of the period, as Putin approached the end of his first term, “it was clear that the country would not follow the path that western observers expected or hoped for” (ibid.).

#### *4.3.1 Putin's second term (2004-2007)*

In the aftermath of the 2004 Russian presidential elections, Putin was re-elected with over 70% of the valid votes. As in 2001, there was considerable evidence of fraud in the voting process, which prompted members of civil society and external observers to claim that the election was rigged. In any case, there was little doubt that the misuse of the state apparatus and biased coverage of the candidates by the (now) predominantly state-controlled mass media outlets influenced the outcome of the elections. Notwithstanding, the president's conduct was generally approved by the population, who benefited from the favourable economic scenario and the introduction of social policies aimed at improving their standard of living. As mentioned, the discursive order had become more stable than ever since the collapse of the Soviet system, which contributed to a secure status for the president and his group, at least as long as they kept to its main elements. These were “stability”, “conservatism” “Russianness” and “great power”, which would supposedly lead the country to an (imprecisely defined) “normalcy”. Inasmuch as the centralization of power did not disrupt this structure, it would not be directly opposed among the mass of the population; moreover, it provided the president new resources and more leeway to implement his own policies.

Two days after his inauguration for a second term, Putin delivers his first **Speech at the Parade (2004)** as usual, saluting the War veterans as “those who brought Victory to each of our homes, saved their motherland and defended the independence of other countries, who gave the world peaceful lives, comfort and freedom”<sup>101</sup>. Without sparing words for the occasion, the leader unequivocally

---

<sup>101</sup> “Приветствую всех, кто в 45-м принес Победу в каждый наш дом, кто спас свою Родину и отстоял независимость других стран, кто подарил миру жизнь, покой и свободу.”

refers to the Victory as “the apex of our glory”, and proceeds with a justification: “namely *our country, our army* inflicted on Nazism the definitive blow”.<sup>102</sup> The familiar description of the Soviet Union as *our land* this year is expanded to include a concrete *our country*; in addition, for the first time the president claims that the Red Army is “ours”.

In an account of the tragedy and virtue witnessed during the War, the president states: “today, after decades, we honour the personal feat of each [one] [...] All those, who gave their lives, defended the unconditional right of the country to be a free country<sup>103</sup>, and gave the planet the day which separated peace from war”.<sup>104</sup> Considering that in 2001 both triumph and sorrow were equated by the gravity of the event, in this year the triumph of the motherland in exchange for the life of its defenders comes up as a logical consequence. The Victory Day is presented as a “common celebration” of Russia and the other CIS countries, whose people fought side by side in “the horrible war against Nazism”. On that account, the veterans of these countries “remember their turbulent youth. For their holy friendship there is no and cannot be any border”.<sup>105</sup> This final statement links the symbolic with the concrete and the personal with the collective: the common memory of the War survivors is stronger than political boundaries, and the common Victory ritual assures that it will remain as such.

Next, Putin addresses the “lessons” of the Second World War. In remembering the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the “second front”—an allusion to D-day and the allied invasion of Normandy—the president reasons that the “final blow” on Nazism came only after combining forces. Even so, fascist ideals still linger in the world—now added to the “no less terrible evil” of international terrorism—and the global community ought to give terrorism “a fitting rebuff” and save the world from this “plague”.<sup>106</sup> Finally, the president stresses that this “day of national union” also compels the present generation to match up with that of their parents and grandparents, and its virtues—among these, Putin cites “to win and be the best<sup>107</sup> in everything”.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> “9 мая – это вершина нашей славы [...] Помним, что именно наша страна, наша армия нанесла нацизму решающий сокрушительный удар, повергла его в прах, предопределила исход Второй мировой войны.”

<sup>103</sup> The original word (*derzhava*) means/denotes a powerful, great/strong nation.

<sup>104</sup> “И сегодня, спустя десятилетия, мы чтим личный подвиг каждого, вспоминаем всех, кто остался на полях сражений, был замучен в лагерях, умер от голода и ран. Всех, кто отдал свои жизни, отстоял безусловное право страны быть свободной державой, и подарил планете день, отделивший мир от войны.”

<sup>105</sup> “Это общий праздник народов России и стран Содружества Независимых Государств. Мы были вместе в страшной борьбе против нацизма [...] И ветераны Великой Отечественной – они вспоминают грозную молодость, вспоминают своих однополчан. Для их святой дружбы нет и не может быть никаких границ.”

<sup>106</sup> “Сегодняшняя дата – еще один повод обратиться к урокам Второй мировой. Мы знаем, как зарождался фашизм. И что окончательный удар по нацизму мир смог нанести, только объединив усилия.[...] В этом году мы вместе будем отмечать 60-летие открытия второго фронта. Но и сегодня мы не вправе закрывать глаза на то, что еще гуляют по миру и нацистская свастика, и идеи фашизма. И что к ним прибавилось не менее страшное зло – международный терроризм. [...] Задача всего мирового сообщества – дать террористам достойный отпор, избавить мир от этой заразы.”

<sup>107</sup> Literally, “to be the first” (*byt’ pervym*)

<sup>108</sup> “И гордимся тем, что у нас есть такой день, день нашего национального единения. [...] Он заставляет равняться

As during 2000 (SP) and 2003 (SR), at the **Speech at the Reception (2004)** the president accredits intentionality to the Soviet combatants, who “dreamed to reach the Victory”—both at the time when they were “driving the enemy out of the native land” and when they were “liberating Europe from him”. Not only that, they were fully aware that “justice triumphs” and that “retaliation will be inevitable”.<sup>109</sup> Arguably, the War narrative becomes teleological: only one outcome is possible. The mythical endeavour is still present today, and “there can be no doubt that retaliation will be inevitable also for those against whom we fight today. It will be inevitable for the terrorists”.<sup>110</sup>

Although this time the president does not specifically mention it, a terrorist act took place during the 9 May celebrations, with much more serious implications than that of 2002. An explosion killed the Moscow-backed president of Chechnya, Akhmed Kadyrov, during the VD parade in the republic’s capital, Grozny. Not only it was a strike directed not only against the region’s main authority, it also represented a symbolic attack on the ritual increasingly connected to Russian national pride. In addition, a shift of the “national” Chechen cause to “civilizational/religious” clash raised concerns that the conflict could spread out to other republics with a Muslim majority. This fear materialized a few months afterwards, when Islamic insurgents captured a school in the Republic of Ingushetia, taking more than 1,100 people hostage, mainly school-age children. The chaotic succession of events culminated in the storming of the school and the death of most of the hostage-takers and many of their victims. The response of the government authorities—and Putin himself—was highly criticized, and partially blamed for the tragic outcome. Nonetheless, the process of centralization of power around the president, the federal government and its security agencies—in particular, by tougher laws on terrorism and the replacement of the elections to regional governors by direct appointment. These measures, in turn, point toward a “securitization” of political process “for the sake of stability” (Perovic & Casula 2009a:24). In the discourse of “normalcy”, the acute aversion to terrorism and the situation in the north Caucasus derived from the lawlessness and social chaos they entail. This helps in understanding Putin’s suggestive statement that “we’ve got Chechnya wherever you look” (Wydra 2007:203): as an uncomfortable reminder of the unpredictable 1990s, the success in defeating the threat symbolically meant the success of the country in overcoming its period of social turbulence as well.

---

на своих отцов и на своих дедов. На их талант любить Родину. На их волю к свободе. На их готовность отстоять каждую пядь родной земли. И побеждать – побеждать и быть первыми во всем.”

<sup>109</sup> “В те страшные дни каждый воин мечтал дойти до Победы – и когда гнал врага с родной земли, и когда освобождал от него Европу. [...] Но все, кто воевал и смог пережить эти жестокие четыре года, твердо знали: справедливость восторжествует и возмездие будет неотвратимо.”

<sup>110</sup> “В те страшные дни каждый воин мечтал дойти до Победы – и когда гнал врага с родной земли, и когда освобождал от него Европу. [...] Но все, кто воевал и смог пережить эти жестокие четыре года, твердо знали: справедливость восторжествует и возмездие будет неотвратимо. [...] возмездие будет неотвратимо и для тех, с кем мы сегодня ведем борьбу. Оно будет неотвратимо для террористов.”

As the end of the year approached, another event would have a substantial impact on Russia's leadership and its public opinion. A wave of protests broke out in Ukraine, immediately after the results of the country's presidential election, widely perceived as fraudulent. As a result, the country's Supreme Court ordered a revote in which the winner of the former ballot, the Russian-speaking (and pro-Moscow) candidate Viktor Yanukovich, lost to Viktor Yushchenko, whose platform was one of strengthening ties with the European Union (EU) and commitment to the promotion of a Ukrainian identity further away from the Soviet legacy and Russian influence. Much like in its larger neighbour, Ukrainian society was resolving its relation with the Soviet past in its own terms, with two competing worldviews struggling for dominance. Accordingly, the changes in the political configuration also corresponded with a shift in the country's symbolic order, with corresponding repercussions on the country's social, political and cultural spheres—in fact, the transformation was eventually dubbed the Orange Revolution. The material and symbolic similarities between the two post-Soviet countries made the Russian leadership perceive itself to be at risk. Acutely concerned that the event would damage its interests in the country and perhaps spread to its own society, the Russian leadership emphatically condemned the upheaval.

In contrast to this unfavourable setting, Putin put great effort in making the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victory a prime event, showcasing Russia's political influence as a major global player. Accordingly, heavy machinery was back in the Red Square for the first time since Soviet times; another novelty was the presence of aircrafts during the ceremony (Stanislav Derkachev 2011b). On the other hand, this was the last year that the War veterans participated in the Parade, but this time riding on military vehicles—by 2005, most of them were already too old for marching (periskop 2013c). The dais used in this year was many times larger than the ones used in the previous year, arguably due to the large number of foreign heads of state invited to attend the celebration from the privileged location. For the first time the authorities did not have to stand during the Victory Parade, as there were seats on the dais (periskop 2013c). Therefore, the American President George W. Bush and his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao were sitting next to Putin; Gerald Schroeder (Germany), Jacques Chirac (France) and Silvio Berlusconi (Italy) were also present, as well as the leaders of India, Poland, Japan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Latvia and the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (Stanislav Derkachev 2011b). Interestingly enough, Viktor Yushchenko, the president of the “orange” Ukraine, also attended, perhaps in a gesture meant to ease the anxiety the political events in Ukraine had raised among the Russian leadership. Surprisingly enough, the president of Latvia, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, was also present, in contrast to the leaders of the two other Baltic countries, as these countries were increasingly at odds with an event that depicted the War purely as a liberation of Eastern Europe, thus downplaying the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its secret

clauses. On that account, the “pro-active” attendance of the Latvian president could be regarded as “a sign for memory to finally loosen its grip on Baltic-Russian foreign policy decision”—and potentially improve EU-Russia relations at large. (Onken 2007:41).

Bearing that in mind, the content of the **Speech at the Parade (2005)** incorporated the extended audience. These political figures represented a more comprehensive historical narrative than that of the Great Patriotic War alone, and Putin explored this aspect throughout the speech. The president begins with the elements consistently present during VD speeches: the responsibility the War memory brings for honouring the deceased and avoiding a repetition of a similar state of affairs. Assessing the circumstances at the time, he then states that the War involved “61 countries and virtually 80 percent of the world’s population [...] [but] the most cruel and decisive happening, defining both the drama and the outcome of this inhuman war, unfolded in the territory of the Soviet Union”<sup>111</sup>. After mentioning some important battles on the Eastern front, the president adds: “we never divided the victory into ours and theirs. And we will always remember the help of the allies [...] but we also know that the Soviet Union lost [...] tens of millions of its citizens, among whom were [...] people from all nationalities of the former USSR”. Notwithstanding the initial attempt at minimizing the divergence of WWII narratives, Putin’s observation reflects the divide separating what Wertsch (2008, 2008b) considers to be different “mnemonic communities” along with their respective roles—geographically, politically and even metaphysically—in the War period. By referring to “us”, the leader means not only the Russian Federation, but also the common heirs of the Soviet Union willing to share the Victory narrative. According to the leader, the concrete political representation of this group is the CIS, where 9 May remains the “holiest date” and for which “brotherhood and friendship [have] no alternative”.<sup>112</sup>

As in other years, Putin argues that the War warns that violence, indifference and inertia inevitably lead to global tragedies. For this reason, he proceeds, when “facing the real threat of terrorism, we must remain faithful to the memory of our parents (forebears)”. This means to stand for a “world order based on security and justice, in a new culture of relations which does not allow any repetition of

---

<sup>111</sup> “Но каждый год в день 9 Мая мы будем скорбеть о погибших, мы будем помнить о той войне [...] Она обязывает нас к высокой ответственности и заставляет глубже осознать какими чудовищными последствиями могли обернуться насилие и расовая нетерпимость, геноцид и надругательство над людьми. [...] В пламенную орбиту Второй мировой было вовлечено 61 государство и практически 80 процентов населения земли [...] Но самые жестокие и решающие события, определившие и драму, и исход этой бесчеловечной войны, разворачивались на территории Советского Союза.”

<sup>112</sup> “Результаты сражений под Москвой и в Сталинграде, мужество блокадного Ленинграда, успехи на Курской дуге и Днепре предопределили результаты Второй мировой войны [...] Мы никогда не делили Победу на свою и чужую. И всегда будем помнить помощь союзников [...] Но мы также знаем, что Советский Союз потерял за эти годы войны десятки миллионов своих граждан, а среди воинов, погибших на полях сражений были люди всех национальностей бывшего СССР. [...] И потому 9 Мая – священная дата для всех стран Содружества Независимых Государств. [...] Убежден, нашему братству и нашей дружбе нет альтернативы.”

‘cold’ or ‘hot’ wars”.<sup>113</sup> Next, the Russian president simultaneously praises the efforts for providing peace and harmony in Europe, as well as each country’s right to choose its path of development based on the ideals of freedom and democracy; an emblematic example of this, he reasons, is the reconciliation between Russia and Germany, “one of the highest achievements of post-war Europe”.<sup>114</sup>

The **Speech at the Reception (2005)** also starts with an inclusive tone, as Europe and the world believed and expected “the greatest justice” of 9 May. Interestingly enough, this brings the allied countries to the heart of the Victory narrative, as they remember the end of WWII on the day before. In another blend of mnemonic practices, Putin presents WWII as the “most tragic”, but also the “most heroic” event of the twentieth century—this last element is mostly present on the GPW narrative, not necessarily shared with other accounts. On that account, with the victory over fascism, people won the right to “freedom”, “life” and the “independent choice of development path”.<sup>115</sup>

After remarking on and summarizing usual elements, as in the morning’s speech, Putin once again warns that beliefs similar to fascism still manifest themselves through terrorism and “extremism”, which objectively threaten civilization. The president argues for a joint response based on international cooperation, tracing its roots to the joint effort made during WWII.<sup>116</sup> Finally, the president thanks those who supported the Soviet Union and reaffirmed its distinction in taking the most severe blow of the war. Next he underscores that he is “truly happy” to celebrate this day in such an internationally representative circle, defining the War as “one of the most important prologues” for the formulation of the United Nations.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> “Уроки войны предупреждают, что пособничество насилию, безучастность и выжидание неизбежно ведут к страшным трагедиям мирового масштаба. И потому перед лицом реально существующих сегодня угроз терроризма мы должны оставаться верными памяти наших отцов. [...] обязаны отстаивать миропорядок, основанный на безопасности и справедливости, на новой культуре взаимоотношений, не допускающей повторения ни «холодных», ни «горячих» войн.”

<sup>114</sup> “С тех пор как закончилась эпоха глобальной конфронтации, мы значительно продвинулись к высокой цели – к обеспечению мира и спокойствия в Европе. Мы строим свою политику на идеалах свободы и демократии, на праве каждого из государств самостоятельно выбирать свой путь развития [...] ярким примером такой политики является историческое примирение между Россией и Германией. Считаю его одним из самых ценных достижений послевоенной Европы, примером, достойным для распространения в современной мировой политике.”

<sup>115</sup> “9 мая 45-го года свершилась величайшая справедливость. В нее верила и ее ждала вся Европа, весь мир. На нее надеялся весь мир [...] Для нас очевидно, что Вторая мировая была самым трагическим событием прошлого века. Но одновременно с этим она была и самым героическим событием той эпохи. В борьбе с нацизмом были отвоены права людей на свободу, на саму жизнь, на самостоятельный выбор пути развития.”

<sup>116</sup> [...] идеи фашизма и расового превосходства все еще не изжиты. Они все еще очень сильны и могут привести к новым катастрофам. Похожие идеи лежат в основе экстремизма и терроризма [...] Понимая это, мы обязаны укреплять сотрудничество в борьбе с этим злом, реально угрожающим цивилизации. Убежден: у мирового сообщества есть для этого все возможности [...] вместе им противостоять. Без преувеличения, осознание этого было выстрадано еще в период Второй мировой.

<sup>117</sup> “сегодня мы искренне благодарим всех, кто в страшные 40-е годы поддержал Советский Союз, принявший на себя самый мощный, самый жестокий удар войны [...] Пользуясь случаем, еще раз подчеркну: я искренне рад тому, что мы отмечаем этот день вместе, в столь представительном международном составе [...] Победа в



For the first time in the period studied, the Victory ritual was shared with an audience largely alien to its narrative content. In Putin's account, the narrative remains a template to deal with the political issues at both national and global levels. In consequence, Putin moderated its traditional commentary with a stress on the "common tragedy" of all the participants of the conflict and even with an expansion of the "common glory" trope to the wider WWII narrative. Arguably, the intention is to attend to the two main ramifications of the "great power" signifier: the traditional emphasis on the Soviet/Russian merit in "saving the world" from the Nazi threat and the acknowledgement of the Russian Federation as a respectable player in the international arena. As such, he uses a conciliatory but uncompromising tone, aiming at bringing different standpoints closer to the GPW/VD narrative. The results of these efforts were and remain ambiguous, as over time, measures taken to establish what Mälksoo (2015) calls "mnemonical security" rendered some points non-negotiable by its respective mnemonic communities. In the case of Russia-Baltic relations, it concerns specifically whether USSR occupied or liberated Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. As such, debating the topic presents itself as the only solution to the political attrition between these countries, at the same time that it is paradoxically not open to debate by any party. Regardless, the 70<sup>th</sup> Victory Day celebration, perhaps for the first time, put the issue at the heart of international politics, thus becoming a "landmark" in European memory politics (Mälksoo 2009:671; Onken 2007:44)

As expected, the 9 May ritual in 2006 did not have the pomposity of the previous year. In comparison, the decoration of the Red Square and its surrounding buildings looked rather modest (Stanislav Derkachev 2011h). On that account, the **Speech at the Parade (2006)** was not as indicative in terms of global affairs as in 2005. As usual, the deliverance is opened by inflated congratulations, this time for "the great triumph of our nation". Shortly after that, Putin again refers to a conflict that struck "almost all the European countries", at the same time that the fiercest blows were felt at the (geographically imprecise) "our motherland"<sup>118</sup>. After citing a countrywide cohesion and faith in the Victory that was "unknown in history", he once again urges nations to act through solidarity, freedom and neighbourliness in order to face contemporary threats to global security and democratic world order.<sup>119</sup> Before that, the president used the word "democratic" only in 2000, when he took office for the first time, and in the previous year. This Speech seems to be less purposeful than in the previous

---

войне 41 – 45-го годов стала одним из важнейших прологов к формированию такой уникальной и масштабной международной структуры как Организация Объединенных Наций [...]."

<sup>118</sup> "[...] с днем великого триумфа нашего народа [...]. Страшная, испепеляющая сила обрушилась тогда почти на все страны Европы. Но самый главный и самый лютой удар был нанесен нашей Родине."

<sup>119</sup> "И такого единства, такого святого братства, такой мощной веры в победу еще не знала история. Именно этот общенародный подвиг решил исход всей Второй мировой, принес освобождение не только нашей стране, но и миру. [...] потому солидарность народов мира перед лицом сегодняшних угроз остается решающим, бесценным ресурсом, а мир, свобода, добрососедство народов – оплотом справедливого демократического мироустройства и глобальной безопасности."

years, opening new horizons in the customary descriptions of sorrow and triumph on the front; Putin ponders the fact that “forever lost [are] priceless works of art and culture. We will never return the life, the talent, the hope of the sons and daughters of the motherland deceased in this war. And that is the greatest, truly permanent loss of our people”.<sup>120</sup>

As in the previous year (SR 2006), Putin reaffirms the “inevitability of retribution” to those that sow “Nazism, racial hostility, extremism, xenophobia”.<sup>121</sup> At the same time that Putin specifies four threats, he surprisingly leaves the word terrorism out of the Speech—for the first time since he came to power. Even though the conflict in the Caucasus was far from reaching a solution, the shocking attacks on the civilian population diminished as the separatist movement lost momentum due to defections and the establishment of a strong Chechen pro-Moscow force under Ramzan Kadyrov. Moreover, the long envisioned partnership against terrorism at the international level was mostly discredited among the Russian elite. Consequently, a broader and vaguer definition of threat allowed for an inclusion of potentially adverse situations of a different sort, such as social unrest and political opposition.

According to Putin, during the last decades, “our” understanding of what “we” faced and against whom “we” fought during those years grew “better and deeper”, in the conflict that, “in terms of casualties and magnitude of destruction” had no equal in history.<sup>122</sup> “Our understanding” means the narrative as collectively perceived not only by the Russian people, but also by all those who carry the legacy of the Soviet front—more precisely, by those that partake in the symbolic system represented by the Victory narrative. This is the third year in a row that the president mentions this “understanding” as a development in itself. Furthermore, the president alludes to the historical “uniqueness” of the event for the second time in speech.

Overall, this year’s speech is distinctively unimaginative in the Victory main tropes, which might explain the vagueness in labelling the topical threats, as well as the reference to cultural heritage. Finally, the commonplace nature of many statements, taken from previous deliveries without further elaboration and repeating themselves (as in the case of the uniqueness of the event), as well as the “deeper understanding” of an event that by itself cannot provide new information—all of these

---

<sup>120</sup> Навсегда утрачены бесценные творения искусства и культуры. Мы уже никогда не вернем жизни, талант, надежды погибших в ту войну сыновей и дочерей Родины. И это самая большая, поистине безвозвратная потеря для нашего народа.

<sup>121</sup> Те, кто вновь пытается поднять повергнутые стяги нацизма, кто сеет расовую вражду, экстремизм, ксенофобию, ведут мир в тупик, к бессмысленным кровопролитиям и жестокости. И потому крах фашизма должен стать уроком и предупреждением о неотвратимости возмездия.

<sup>122</sup> И с высоты прошедших десятилетий мы еще лучше, еще глубже осознаем, что им пришлось пережить и с чем пришлось столкнуться, ведь по жестокости, по количеству жертв и масштабу разрушений этой войне тоже нет равных в истории.”

indicate an institutionalization of the ritual. As Russia's national identity was consolidating its momentum under Putin, so was its main ritual as alternative representations were fading.

In this year, as well as in the next one, I did not find any speeches at the Reception on the official Kremlin archives, nor in any other sources.

The **Speech at the Parade (2007)** is the only one analysed from this year. Putin starts with congratulations for the holiday of “huge moral value and unifying power, which will be forever in the fate of Russia”; an event that gave several examples of “mass heroism” and soldiers that kept faith in the Victory “in spite of everything”. The president mentions the millions of people that “defended the independence and the dignity of its country” both “on the frontlines and in the rear”. This emphasis on the “close relationship between the front and the rear” was already present during the War itself (Gill 2010:144), including all GPW participants into the heroic narrative, regardless of whether they actually were at the battlefields or not. In the Speeches analysed, the word “rear” (*tyl'*) is consistently present. As such, the president symbolically outlines a horizontal convergence of different social strata, similar to the vertical convergence presented by the generations that inherit the merits of the War survivors. Although not present in the content of the Speeches, this unitary view of the social fabric indirectly raises a demand for a “great leader”. Accordingly, Putin promotes gestures that personally associate him with the ritual, such as accounts of his family's suffering during the blockade of Leningrad (Wood 2000). This suits the current political configuration as well, where “president Putin” itself becomes a signifier aggregating social demands (Prozorov 2005:121).<sup>123</sup>

When addressing the relevancy of the GPW to the contemporary world, Putin observes that the Victory day, as the War's temporal expression, is the day “we invariably think about the world's fate, its stability and security”. Furthermore, its presence is felt more strongly as time passes, as “the lessons of that war acquire more meaning and significance each year”.<sup>124</sup> As in the previous year, there is an emphasis on the “dynamic” nature of the historical commemoration as a source of inspiration to be kept in mind in daily life. The War is therefore felt as a collective experience increasingly associated with the moral and cultural development of the country through its yearly socialization practices. Its narrative exemplifies a path to “normalcy”: an event that is both national and Soviet (“Russianness” and “uniqueness”), respect

---

<sup>123</sup> “Поздравляю вас с Днем великой Победы, с праздником огромного нравственного значения и объединяющей силы, с праздником, который навеки в судьбе России. [...] Но война не сломила народный дух и дала множество примеров массового героизма. Пройдя через все муки и лишения, теряя своих товарищей, солдаты вопреки всему сохраняли веру в Победу. Миллионы людей защищали независимость и достоинство своей страны на фронтах и в тылу, в оккупации и подполье и доказали: народ, отстаивающий свою свободу и само право на жизнь, – непобедим!”

<sup>124</sup> “[...] и уроки той страшной войны с каждым годом приобретают все больший смысл и значение.”

Putin resumes the 2003-2005 promotion of the Victory as a common memory shared by the former Soviet countries—in particular CIS countries. The president praises their “tradition of brotherhood and solidarity [...] experience of unity and mutual help” as a historical heritage to be “piously” preserved.<sup>125</sup> The “national” commemoration is alive beyond Russia’s political borders. Perhaps for the first time in the period covered by this study, the president warns against those “who nowadays try to diminish this invaluable experience, [those] who violate the memory of the war heroes [as they] insult its own people, sow discord and renewed distrust between states and peoples”<sup>126</sup>. A few observations on these remarks are needed, as they are part of the war over memory and identity in Russia and the Baltic states. In April 2007, nationalist Estonian groups pressured for the removal of the “Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn”, or simply the “Bronze Soldier”, for it represented to them the beginning of the Soviet occupation. This move infuriated the sizable Russian population of the Estonian capital, to the extent that some groups representing Orthodox Christians went as far as to frame it as a fight between the “Third Rome” (Moscow) against an “occult Nazi Third Reich” (Wertsch 2008a:136). As such, it is interesting how the disputed historical event—whether the Soviet presence was an occupation or a liberation—becomes a divide between collective identities in their entirety—in this case, opposing Russian Orthodoxy with Estonian Protestantism. The historical event itself has no importance as such. By some historical accounts, the Soviets did not fight a battle to defend Tallinn, and any association of the atheist state with Russian Orthodoxy defies common sense. On the other hand, the past is alive as politics. Although not explicitly mentioned, it is patent that Putin is addressing the removal of the Bronze Soldier as an act of “violation of memory” by the Estonian state towards its “own people (*narod*)”, thus provoking a “renewed distrust between states and peoples (*lyudi*)”. It is worth noticing that in the first case the president places the Russian minority within the national folkloric identity of Estonia by considering it *narod*, whereas when remarking on its relation with the Estonian state he separates them as a mass of people (*lyudi*) alienated from the political expression of the country. To some extent, these statements resonate with the Russian president’s manifest policy of “ensuring the rights of Russian compatriots” in the post-Soviet space, at the same that it also understands this population to be part of the local community—as such, he tries to reconcile the civil status of the local population with the identity represented by the Soviet Union, whose collapse was, in a well-known remark, the “biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” (Putin 2005). As such, the Soviet legacy is regarded as part of the post-Soviet identity as

---

<sup>125</sup> “День Победы роднит и объединяет не только граждан России, но и наших ближайших соседей в странах Содружества. [...] Они передали нам свои традиции братства и солидарности, поистине выстраданный опыт единения и взаимопомощи. И мы будем свято хранить память об этом, свято хранить это историческое достояние.”

<sup>126</sup> “А те, кто пытается сегодня принизить этот бесценный опыт, кто оскверняет памятники героям войны, оскорбляет собственный народ, сеет рознь и новое недоверие между государствами и людьми.”

heirs of a common, multi-ethnic state, where everyone had the same conditions—and the same hardships—regardless of their nationality. As the GPW/VD narrative was part of the “Sovietness” of this people, the CIS countries share the “common Victory”—and therefore the common identity. This stands in contrast to the interpretation prevailing in Estonia and the other Baltic countries, for whom the Soviet Union was essentially a “Russian” phenomenon (Wertsch 2008a:135).

Next, the president locates the origins of any war “in the ideologies of confrontation and extremism”. Threats do not diminish, argues Putin, but “only transform themselves”. As during the time of the “third Reich”, they share the same “contempt for human life”, “pretensions of world exclusivity and diktat”—and must be countered by “common responsibility” and “equal partnership”. Continuing the trend of the previous year, the definition of a threat is less defined in concrete terms and more in moral ones. In particular, it is interesting how the “pretensions of world exclusivity” in the international arena contrasts with a positive cultural “uniqueness” in the Russian national identity.<sup>127</sup>

Gradually but perceivably, the Victory Speeches “broaden” their scope, incorporating more elements to the main narrative. As the 9 May commemoration increasingly occupies the privileged spaces of the national imaginary, the laudatory remarks on the veterans’ “deeds” and enthusiastic statements about their moral consistency become more casual and less disputable—thus, both “lessons” and “warnings” pertain to topical issues in the present. To a great degree, it reflects what Hopf (2009:4) calls the “new” Russian identity emerging from 2003, in which the country is not compared against its western or eastern counterparts, but against its own “nature”. The engagement with the “Western” countries occurs in a selective basis subordinated to the “counter-hegemonic” discourse in the international arena.

During Putin’s second term, successive reorganizations in the post-Soviet “near abroad” put into question Russia’s role in the region, causing a growing feeling of “encirclement” among the country’s elite at a time when it was seeking to reassert the common inheritance of the defunct Soviet society as a unifying factor on both sides of its borders. Internal “revolutions” against regimes sympathetic to Russian interests occurred in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2005) while NATO expanded its membership to the former Soviet republics in the Baltics (2004) and proposed a missile defence system in former socialist countries (2007). At a time that the Russian GPW narrative and the country’s political order were increasingly associated in the national imaginary, these events

---

<sup>127</sup> “Мы не вправе забывать: причины всякой войны нужно прежде всего искать в ошибках и просчетах мирного времени, а их корни – в идеологии конфронтации и экстремизма. Тем более что и в наши дни таких угроз не становится меньше. Они лишь трансформируются, меняют свое обличье. И в этих новых угрозах, как и во времена «третьего рейха», все то же презрение к человеческой жизни, те же претензии на мировую исключительность и диктат. Убежден, только общая ответственность и равноправное партнерство способны противостоять этим вызовам,”

contested both by suggesting an inadequacy in “Russianness” and “stability”, converting positive elements (“uniqueness” and “conservatism”) into negative ones (“isolation” and “democratic deficit/authoritarianism”).

The 2005 VD Speeches, in particular, made this uneasiness visible. The demand for a “new world order” showed, for the first time in a VD Speech, the leader’s dissatisfaction with the geopolitical circumstances of the time. As both internal (terrorism) and external (political changes and sociocultural distancing in the former Soviet republics) events were a direct attack on “stability” in its existing form, the Kremlin’s counter-offensive consisted in strengthening the centrality of “uniqueness” in the discursive structure of “normalcy” to a level unparalleled in post-Soviet Russia. The 2005 Speeches underscored the Soviet/Russian continuum as a source of moral authority in regards to Europe, in “liberating it from Nazism”. This symbolic capital legitimizes its envisioned status on the continent, besides representing the “entrance ticket” to the group of global super powers (Zhurzhenko 2007). At the same time, the Speech also provides a moral leadership towards the CIS countries and the near abroad as a whole (which had the right to share the “common Victory” with Russia due to their Soviet heritage). On that account, Russia’s Eurasian “uniqueness” evokes the image of a European nation mediating the relationship between this continent and Asia.

On this same vein, the strong impact the Orange Revolution had in the Russian leadership further motivated symbolic measures aiming at counterbalancing its repercussions with renewed emphasis the association between “conservatism” and “stability”. As such, NGOs were brought under stricter control of the Kremlin, and protest movements became increasingly portrayed as an “artificial” form of mobilization, “paid for or manipulated by various political forces”, and being motivated by power struggles between elites (Kurilla 2010:2). As for the general GPW narrative, this coincides with the diminished official attention given to the independent partisan movements defending the Soviet land from the German attack (*idem.* 4). In a striking example of politics of memory, in 2005 the October Revolution was replaced by the National Unity Day as a holiday—therefore, the socialist revolution gave way to the commemoration of the “united” efforts in liberating Muscovy from foreign invaders during the “Times of Trouble” in the seventeenth century (*idem.* 2).

The Victory’s role in guaranteeing each country’s “right to choose” its own path of development, as advocated during SP 2005, stood on behalf of Russia’s “managed democracy”. Later, it was further elaborated with the concept of “sovereign democracy” (Surkov 2006), defending the “specific traits” of the “Russian path” to democracy (Sakwa 2010:21-22). Accordingly, the country’s “democratic deficit” and “isolation” is reframed in a “pluralist” conceptualization of democracy, in which “Russia has no objection on democratic values, but denies that the West has the monopoly on these values”

(Surkov 2006). In the same vein, the demand for a “strong (great) power” meant that democracy had to be coupled with strength to provide the state with the means to “‘guide’ society in the right direction” (Perovic & Casula, 2009a:23). Putin’s image as a “strong leader” both supported and was supported by this signifier. Whereas the Russian law forbids the president to take office for more than two consecutive terms, his successful centralization of power during the previous years raised concerns over the possibility of him overruling the law in favour of his own personal aspirations as the head of the country. This concern proved wrong, and Dmitry Medvedev won the 2008 presidential elections as the candidate of United Russia, the party representing the group in power.

#### *4.3.3 Medvedev’s interim (2008-2012)*

Dmitry Medvedev took office as the third president of the Russian Federation on May 7, 2008. His candidacy for the highest post in the country was carefully designed by Putin, who was now the prime minister, and executed through his party United Russia. Therefore, the succession did not represent major changes in the political sphere. To some extent, Medvedev was expected to be a “softer” ruler than Putin, due to his background as a lawyer and his reputation as a tolerant and progressive politician. On the other hand, the prime minister’s new prerogatives meant that Medvedev was de facto sharing much of the important decisions with Putin, in what was later dubbed “tandem” (joint) rule. Due to the political continuity, the GPW/VD narrative continued its established course. As such, the president continued (and intensified) some of the practices supporting the importance of the Victory Day as a central cultural, social and political manifestation in modern Russia.

By 2008, the parading of heavy machinery at the Square was well established and, starting from that year, the vehicles were covered with a special material in order to avoid damaging the surface of the Red Square. Likewise, it was the first time the air forces took part in the Parade in a systematic fashion (Channel One 2012). Bearing in mind that the Victory Parade was one of Medvedev’s first appearances as the head of state, and even more that he was speaking on such a sensitive topic, his Speech was most likely that moderated by top officials, in particular the former president. In any case, the War narrative already had a definite role in the country’s system of meanings.

Accordingly, Medvedev begins the **Speech at the Parade (2008)** by greeting the audience on the “most popular” and “holiest” of the holidays, the one that “became a symbol of our unity”. The new president continues the trend started in 2005-06 of conceptualizing the War as an evolving narrative with growing significance, arguing that time can only deepen the understanding of the War’s “determining, fateful character” for the world. Furthermore, it directly concerns CIS countries, as “the farther the happenings of that terrible war, the more expensive our age-old brotherhood and

solidarity [and] the higher our common responsibility in global affairs”. The Victory Day is therefore not a national Russian celebration, but rather represents all those “who honour the heroism of the nations that defeated fascism”.<sup>128</sup>

Medvedev then proceeds to refer to the lessons of the War to prevent this kind of tragedy from repeating, as “armed conflicts do not start by themselves”. The concrete counterpart of this “lesson” is a call for “seriously tackling” attempts at “sowing racial and religious hostility, provoking ideologies of terror and extremism” as well as “intentions of intruding in other countries’ affairs” and “attempts to revise (national) borders”<sup>129</sup>. Whereas the first two threats are explicit components of the War narrative since 2006, the latter two are mentioned in a Speech for the first time. The specific geopolitical issue it concerns is the unilateral declaration of independence by the Kosovar parliament, which was promptly recognized by several states. Kosovo was still a very sensitive subject in Russian public opinion, and even though ten years had passed since it was put under UN administration, its formal declaration of independence from Serbia raised an emphatic protest from both the Serbian and the Russian governments. Given its political importance, the VD Parade was a privileged venue for voicing discontent.

The **Speech at the Reception (2008)** followed the order established by Medvedev’s predecessor, including its personal tone. After greeting his “colleagues”, the president affirms that the “special holiday” has no parallels in the country’s history, both in greatness and in suffering, and that the “dramatic events” of those years belong to the “biography of the country” as well as to the “annals of our families”. As during the earlier Speech at the Parade, an emphasis on family ties and on the lineage connecting the GPW warriors with current generations merges the national with the personal. As such, the War memory serves to remind that the defence of the country is not a civic abstraction of the past, but a living duty of each to protect their loved ones.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> “[...] с праздником, который всегда был и останется самым народным, самым священным и который уже навеки стал символом нашего национального единства! [...] Мы лишь глубже понимаем их определяющий, судьбоносный для мира характер и всё больше осознаём, насколько драматичная судьба выпала на долю военного поколения [...] И сегодня День Победы отмечают миллионы граждан не только нашей страны, но и государств СНГ, дальнего зарубежья. Его отмечают все, кто чтит подвиг народов, разгромивших фашизм. И чем дальше события той страшной войны, тем дороже наше вековое братство и солидарность, тем выше наша общая ответственность за дела на планете.”

<sup>129</sup> “История мировых войн предупреждает: вооруженные конфликты не рождаются сами по себе. [...] И потому мы должны помнить уроки той войны и каждый день делать всё, чтобы такие трагедии не повторялись. [...] Надо крайне серьёзно относиться к любым попыткам посеять расовую или религиозную вражду, разжечь идеологию террора и экстремизма, к намерениям вторгаться в дела других государств, а тем более – к попыткам пересмотра границ.”

<sup>130</sup> “[...] Уважаемые, коллеги [...] 9 Мая – это особый для нашего народа праздник: другого такого – столь великого, сколь и выстраданного – у нас, пожалуй, не найти [...] Драматические события тех лет навсегда в нашей памяти, в страницах биографии страны, в летописях наших семей.”



The president then states that the War experience moulded the national character with “authentic examples of patriotism, nobleness and self-sacrifice”. With this, the president concludes, “our people” accomplished their “historical mission” of liberating their country and Europe, saving the world from Nazism and “predetermining the outcome of the whole Second World War”. The individual “intention” and “faith” in the Victory of the previous years is here portrayed as a collective “historical mission” decisive for the results of the global event.<sup>131</sup>

For the first time in the documents analysed, this Speech at the Reception does not address contemporary issues directly. Even so, the narrative still serves as a warning to the threat of political mistakes, although in a more vague tone this time. Medvedev claims that the common people pay for the politicians’ mistakes, taking decades to overcome the consequences of these tragedies.<sup>132</sup> Finally, the president exalts the GPW veterans as the “honourable guardian” of the “truth of (about) the War”—and their life as its “personal testimony”. For the first time, the Russian leader endows the survivors with an enigmatic knowledge, of which they are living evidence.<sup>133</sup>

Notwithstanding the differences in personality between leaders, there were no major changes in regards to the Victory and its meaning, as reflected in the Speeches. It is noticeable that a great part of their content deals with the “broadening” of the Victory discourse, encompassing more elements of everyday life in each yearly review. In comparison to Putin’s first years, these Speeches are not contingent on current affairs as much as they aim at encouraging a personal sense of belonging to the Victory. The threats, in particular “terrorism”, become less urgent in the official deliverances—on April 2009, the war in Chechnya is officially over.

The first major challenge in Medvedev’s administration came in August, during the Beijing Olympic Games. An attempt by the Georgian government to regain control over its separatist region of South Ossetia, traditionally aligned with Russia, triggered a vigorous response by President Medvedev. In a swift operation, Russian troops entered Georgian territory and forced local troops out of the region in less than five days. In the aftermath, Russia recognized South Ossetia along with Abkhazia, another pro-Russia region in Georgia. The Russian government met harsh criticism by many countries, no less for breaking an unwritten rule by waging a military campaign in the middle of the Olympic

---

<sup>131</sup> “Но в те грозные годы на фронте и в тылу рождались подлинные примеры патриотизма, благородства и самопожертвования и закалялся тот самый народный характер, который не раз в нашей истории помогал мужественно бороться с врагом [...] Наш народ с истинным величием выполнил свою историческую миссию. Он не только принёс освобождение своей стране, но и спас мир от нацизма, дал свободу государствам Европы, предрешил исход всей Второй мировой войны.”

<sup>132</sup> “А за кровавые ошибки политиков платят народы, платят старики, женщины, дети. Эти ошибки тяжёлым бременем ложатся на плечи новых поколений. И ещё долгие десятилетия целые страны и континенты не могут преодолеть страшных последствий таких трагедий.”

<sup>133</sup> “Дорогие ветераны Великой Отечественной! Вы – достойные хранители исторической правды о той войне и через всю свою жизнь несёте ее личные свидетельства.”

Games. Firm disapproval came in particular from NATO countries, as Georgia was strengthening its ties with this organization as part of an effort to move away from Russia's sphere of influence. As such, the Russian attack on Georgian territory served as a response—even if not officially acknowledged—to the “Kosovo” precedent as well as to thwart Georgian aspirations to become a member of the military alliance, which specifically forbids accession by states with unresolved internal conflicts.

A significant aspect of the conflict was the relatively new orientation in Russia's leadership. Traditionally a vehement supporter of territorial integrity and national sovereignty due to its own internal conflicts, by 2008 the Russian Federation managed to eliminate most of the separatist inclinations in its territory. At the same time, political events taking place in its neighbourhood were distancing some of the former Soviet republics from the Russian leadership. The social demand for “stability” surpassed its initial reactive role of maintaining Russia's territorial integrity to a more proactive stance of asserting the country's leadership in the region and influence in global affairs at large. On that account, the idea of toppling a hostile pro-NATO government and at the same time protecting “Russians citizens abroad” satisfied the promotion of an incontestable “(great) power” catering to “Russianness” outside its borders, promoting “conservatism” and the new sense of “stability” by opposing governments supporting radical reorientations in Russia's near abroad. Consequently, the Russo-Georgian War was highly acclaimed by Russian public opinion as an event associated with the road to “normalcy”. Concerning “Russian citizens abroad”, it is worth pointing out that the Russian Federation was issuing passports to foreign nationals in communities with close ties to the country, such as South Ossetia, at least since 2002—which from the juridical point of view, is not technically illegal; however, given its role as a pretext for the Russian invasion, can be considered an “abuse of rights” (Natoli 2010).

In the month following the conflict, the impact of the world financial crisis, accompanied by a sharp fall in international oil prices, disrupted Russia's steady economic growth of the previous years. Although the government soon introduced effective measures to tackle the crisis, the event revealed the country's economic dependence on the export of commodities such as oil and gas; the country resumed its economic growth only in 2010.

In view of these events, by 9 May 2009 Medvedev had already gathered considerable experience as the head of state. Accordingly, the new president presents a more authentic style in his second VD delivery. From the very beginning of the **Speech at the Parade (2009)**, the president congratulates the audience on the celebration, pointing out that it is passed down from generation to generation,

and that it will be passed further to their children and grandchildren.<sup>134</sup> As noticed before, the emphasis on a lineage hints at an attempt to promote an enduring genealogy, fit for an epic endeavour that crosses generational (chronological) lines. Medvedev already anticipates the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victory in 2010 as a great event to be commemorated both in the CIS states and in other countries. In this regard, for the first time a Russian head of state labels 9 May as the “Liberation Day”. The president once again asserts the relevancy in the present day of the “great lesson and example” provided by the victory over fascism, in particular at a moment when “again there are those that go for military gambles”. Most likely, this is in reference to the Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili, considered responsible for the conflict in that country by the Russian leadership.

For the first time, the president mentions his initiative on the establishment of a European Security Treaty involving both the Western European/Atlantic (NATO) and the Eurasian (the Collective Security Treaty Organization)<sup>135</sup> security systems based upon international laws, international cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution.<sup>136</sup> It is interesting that this proposal comes during a complicated moment in Atlantic-Russian relations, severely strained in the aftermath of the conflict in Georgia. In fact, this proposal foreshadowed the “reset” of the relations between Russia and its western counterparts in the following year, which included the suspension of NATO’s plans to install missile defence systems in the Czech Republic and Poland in 2009, a project strongly objected to by Russia since its announcement in 2007.<sup>137</sup>

Once again, Medvedev underscores the unifying force of the War in bringing together the personal and the collective in a timeless dimension unaffected by specific developments. In this vein, even though the years after the war brought substantial changes to Russia and the world, many Russian families still keep “pictures from the front and military awards” and read the old letters from the front. Furthermore, the president asserts that the present-day research on the War “reveals (new) names of the deceased” and that a “new tradition” appeared in the last years—the ribbon of Saint George.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup> “С праздником, который передаётся из поколения в поколение и который будут чтить наши внуки и правнуки – так, как это делаем сегодня мы.”

<sup>135</sup> The CSTO originally grew out from the CIS framework, where most of its members also adhered to CSTO, with the exception of Azerbaijan, Moldova and Uzbekistan.

<sup>136</sup> “Сейчас, как никогда, очевидно: безопасный мир возможен лишь там, где строго соблюдаются нормы международного права. И потому наша страна выступила инициатором нового Договора о европейской безопасности. Безопасности, основанной на надёжном контроле над вооружениями и разумной достаточности военного строительства, на самом широком сотрудничестве государств и исключительно мирном урегулировании конфликтов.”

<sup>137</sup> “Сейчас, как никогда, очевидно: безопасный мир возможен лишь там, где строго соблюдаются нормы международного права. И потому наша страна выступила инициатором нового Договора о европейской безопасности. Безопасности, основанной на надёжном контроле над вооружениями и разумной достаточности военного строительства, на самом широком сотрудничестве государств и исключительно мирном урегулировании конфликтов.”

<sup>138</sup> “Шесть послевоенных десятилетий сильно изменили весь мир и нашу страну. Но во многих российских семьях по-прежнему хранят фронтовые фотографии и боевые награды, берегут и перечитывают письма фронтовиков.

Indeed, whereas this ribbon was traditionally associated with the imperial Russian military—during the USSR it was replaced by the “guard’s ribbon”—it was only in 2005 that it was introduced on a large scale as a symbol to be used by those celebrating the Victory; from 2007, it also became an official garment of the authorities (periskop 2013c). On an interesting side note, the overwhelming popularization of the orange-black Saint George ribbon overshadowed the red ribbon—already used in the USSR to symbolize the Victory—in another instance of a Soviet symbol being replaced with one representing the “new” Russia.

The **Speech at the Reception (2009)** pays tribute to the end of the “largest tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”. Once again, Medvedev addresses the moral strength displayed both personally and connected to an unconditional love for the country. The president also emphasises the reforms taking place in the armed forces, adding that during the military Parade in the morning, all those present felt “pride for our country”.<sup>139</sup> Next, the president affirms that the year 1945 brought not only the “huge joy” of the Victory, but also “serious responsibility for the future of the whole world, including in the face of modern threats”. Deeming WWII the “main lesson” of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Medvedev claims that “the Victory holiday came at a very high price”, and for that reason “the peaceful future of the planet is so dear to us”. Finally, the 65th anniversary of the Victory is once again mentioned in the second delivery of the day on the topic, calling for an honourable celebration.<sup>140</sup>

Just a few days after the VD celebration, Medvedev set up the “Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests”. The Commission was an interesting instance of the mix of history and politics, and was directly related to the nature of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, and in particular the significance of WWII to the region. To a certain extent, similar projects already took place in other countries in Eastern Europe (Onken 2007)—in particular Poland and the Baltic states—as a means to come to terms with their past, or at least to define a somewhat consensual view of it. Since in the Russian case it came later and with a clearly reactive inspiration, it was conjectured to be an organization

---

И до сих пор, благодаря поисковой работе, открываются имена павших героев. Их подвиг никогда не будет забыт. И уже в наше время родилась ещё одна, новая традиция – акция «Георгиевская ленточка».”

<sup>139</sup> “9 мая 1945 года навсегда останется днём окончания самой масштабной трагедии XX века [...] Такой нравственной силы, проявленной тогда и армией, и всем народом, можно было достичь только безгранично любя свою Родину. [...] На том же нравственном фундаменте мы сегодня формируем и современную армию. Она должна быть сильной, высокопрофессиональной. [...] Когда проходили наши войска, наши Вооружённые Силы, когда по Красной площади ехала техника, я уверен, каждый из присутствующих здесь, в этом зале, испытывал гордость за нашу страну.”

<sup>140</sup> “[...] май 1945 года принёс нашей стране не только огромную радость Победы, но и серьёзную ответственность за судьбы всего мира, в том числе и перед лицом современных угроз, жертвами которых, к сожалению, продолжают становиться мирные люди [...] Вторая мировая война действительно является главным уроком XX столетия. Праздник Победы достался нашему народу очень высокой ценой. Поэтому нам так дорого мирное будущее планеты [...] Не за горами 65-летний юбилей Победы. И мы, конечно же, должны сделать всё, чтобы встретить его достойно, так, как и подобает наследникам победителей.”

committed to actively promoting historical perspectives convenient to the Russian leadership at home and abroad. Despite being an example of promoting what Mälksoo (2015) calls “mnemonical security”, the Commission kept a low profile and did not attract much international attention. Its activities—which dealt primarily with school textbooks—were discontinued less than two years later, in February 2012.

Medvedev’s envisioned reformist agenda had been hindered in 2008 by the conflict in Georgia and the economic crisis. In fact, during 2008’s Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, the president blamed the United States’ disregard for alternative opinions as the main cause of the global crisis. Moreover, Medvedev listed “the construction of a global missile defence system, the encirclement of Russia with military bases and unrestrained NATO expansion” as ambiguous “presents” to Russia (Medvedev 2008). In 2009, however, the novel orientation became a central part of Russia’s political rhetoric. The recession of the previous year made all the more urgent the necessity to reconfigure the country’s fragile economy, over-dependent on oil and gas exports. “Modernization” became a central concept in the official rhetoric, encompassing economic—but also social and political—reforms. The new strategy, as outlined in Medvedev’s manifesto “Russia ahead!”<sup>141</sup> (Medvedev 2009), proposed to transform Russia into a forward-looking country with a high-tech economy, “driven not by nostalgia, but instead by the pragmatic realities of today.” (Doroņenkova 2011:29). A symbolic “reset” of relations with the US became an important step in reducing the tension with its western counterparts, which had the financial and technological resources necessary for the country’s modernization. Another manifestation of the “détente” was the failed attempt to establish the aforementioned European Security Treaty. Finally, the fight against corruption, which included police reform, also became a chief element in the presidential platform.

As the Victory’s 65<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, the year of 2010 carried a particular relevance. As they had five years before, the arrangements for the day included the presence of several international guests, from both CIS countries—Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Turkmenistan—and from members of the historical anti-German coalition—Poland, GB, USA and France—in a gesture consistent with the manifest spirit of “reset” (Viacheslav Tciplenkov 2015c). At the **Speech at the Parade (2010)**, the Russian president praises the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the defeat of Nazism, the “ideology that destroys the foundations of civilization”.<sup>142</sup> He then argues that the Soviet Union—mentioned for the first time in a Speech during Medvedev’s presidency—“bore the brunt” of the fascist offensive, since “three-quarters” of their troops were directed towards the eastern front. After

---

<sup>141</sup> “*Rossiia, vperēd!*” is also sometimes translated as “Go, Russia!” or “Forward, Russia”.

<sup>142</sup> “65 лет назад был разгромлен нацизм. Остановлена машина уничтожения целых народов. Нашей стране и всей Европе возвращён мир. Положен конец идеологии, разрушавшей основы цивилизации.”

mentioning some of its most remembered battlefields, Medvedev gives no room for ambiguity: the warriors had “one choice: either triumph or become slaves”.<sup>143</sup> In a similar vein, he affirms, “at each day, each hour, each minute people made decisions”, both “at the frontline as at the rearward”. With this, the president opens a new philosophical perspective on the individual wartime effort, since the War narrative usually takes a fatalist overtone by emphasizing the combatants’ faith in the Victory (SR 2000, 2008; SP 2006, 2007) and portraying a nation that fulfilled its “historical mission” (SR 2008). This novel importance attributed to individual decision-making is in line with Medvedev’s reforms, which aim at promoting a “modern” society based on self-reliance and personal responsibility—in fact, the president argues that the veterans kept this “special responsibility for the fate of the country” throughout their entire lives.<sup>144</sup>

The president then proceeds, “time has huge power[,] but it is weaker than human memory, than our memory”. As already noted, this kind of comparison suggests that the temporal event gives way to a timeless dimension of memory. Its motif is constantly present as the heroes of the War, which “we will never forget”. Then, the leader declares what is arguably the best illustration of the significance of the set of rituals and practices examined so far: “in [19]45 was achieved not only a military [victory], but a great moral Victory”. In one sentence, Medvedev categorically summarizes the entire symbolism of the narrative for both the speaker and the audience.<sup>145</sup>

According to Medvedev, the date celebrates the “common Victory” fought by all the nations of the Soviet Union and “*accelerated* by our allies” (my italics). With this statement, the Russian leader assures the audience that the Soviet Union, now represented by its heirs, played a main role in the Victory. Still, he also praises the fact that Russian soldiers will parade “in the same ranks” with those from the CIS countries and the anti-Hitler coalition.<sup>146</sup>

Next, the official and the personal meet once again, when the president points out that “virtually every single family of Russia has those who perished or went missing” in different circumstances. Manifesting a collective recognition of all those living during the War period, Medvedev promises them “eternal memory”. It is interesting that the president affirms that these deaths are “impossible

---

<sup>143</sup> Советский Союз принял на себя основной удар фашистов. Они бросили на восточный фронт три четверти своих войск. [...] Оборона Москвы и Ленинграда, Сталинградская битва, Курская дуга – это не просто этапы той войны. Это кровь и слёзы, горечь поражений и радость побед, ранения и гибель боевых товарищей. И один выбор – либо победить, либо стать рабами.”

<sup>144</sup> “Каждый день, каждый час, каждую минуту люди принимали решения. На полях сражений и в тылу. И эту особую ответственность за судьбу страны наши ветераны пронесли через всю свою жизнь.”

<sup>145</sup> “Время имеет огромную власть. Но оно слабее человеческой памяти, нашей с вами памяти. Мы никогда не забудем солдат, сражавшихся на фронтах. Женщин, заменивших мужчин на заводах. Детей, прошедших через невыносимые для их возраста испытания. Все они – герои войны. [...] В 45-м году была одержана не только военная, но и большая нравственная Победа.”

<sup>146</sup> “Общая Победа. За неё боролись все народы бывшего СССР. Её приближали наши союзники. И сегодня в торжественном параде вместе пройдут солдаты России, государств СНГ и стран антигитлеровской коалиции. Единый строй – свидетельство нашей общей готовности защищать мир.”

to accept” or forget; despite the Victory, the War must remain ever present, oblivious to the progression of time, in order to serve as a model in the present.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, the head of state addresses the lessons of WWII. Once again, the more comprehensive term is used to include those not participating in the GPW, as the War memory calls for a common solidarity in a world that remains fragile. Conflicts never start “overnight”, the leader argues, and “evil gains momentum” and thrives on indifference and neglect, which can only be confronted by joint efforts based on goodwill.<sup>148</sup> On that account, Medvedev resumes early Putin’s warnings against inertia and omission (SP 2002, 2003, 2005; SR 2003).

During the **Speech at the Reception (2010)**, Medvedev contends that the “triumphal and just” Victory on the “bloodiest war of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” remains an “unparalleled feat”, to be remembered along with the “harsh lessons” of the War. Dwelling on the topic, Medvedev points out the terrible consequences of the “pretensions to world domination” and the perils of “attempts to influence free nations and sovereign countries”—reaffirming the warning expressed in 2008 (SP).<sup>149</sup>

Medvedev proceeds to assign to the current generations the “duty” of preventing such conflicts from happening, doing “whatever it takes” to make the “atmosphere of cordiality, cooperation and neighbourliness” the “only possible relation between countries”. He concludes, “if there would be no foes, there would be no reasons for war”.<sup>150</sup>

In another reference to the War symbolism, the president asserts that even after 65 years, the Eternal Fire is brightly burning in the Russian cities, “symbol of our memory of the heroic past”.<sup>151</sup> This is the second time the president refers to one of the ritual’s main symbol, the Saint George Ribbon (SP 2009). Nonetheless, the Victory Banner, the most prominent symbol of the date, was only mentioned during Putin’s first years (SP 2000, 2001, 2006).

---

<sup>147</sup> “В России практически в каждой семье есть те, кто погиб или пропал без вести. Кто умер от голода в блокаду. Кого сожгли в печах концлагерей. С этим невозможно смириться. Невозможно забыть. Вечная им память.”

<sup>148</sup> “Уроки Второй мировой призывают нас к солидарности. Мир по-прежнему хрупок. И мы обязаны помнить: войны не начинаются в одночасье. Зло набирает силу, если перед ним отступают, стараются его не замечать. Только вместе мы можем противостоять современным угрозам. Только на основе добрососедства решать проблемы глобальной безопасности.”

<sup>149</sup> “Победы, которая 65 лет назад триумфально и справедливо завершила самую кровопролитную войну XX столетия [...] Мы никогда не забудем их беспримерного подвига. Не забудем и тех тяжёлых уроков, которые преподнесла война всему человечеству. [...] Война показала, к какой страшной черте могут подвести претензии на мировое господство. Насколько опасны попытки силового давления на свободные народы, на суверенные государства.”

<sup>150</sup> “И, конечно, долг современных поколений – не допустить повторения такого сценария, подобных глобальных конфликтов. Сделать всё, чтобы атмосфера добросердечности, сотрудничества и добрососедства стала единственно возможной в отношениях между государствами. Если на земле не останется враждующих – не будет и причины для войн.”

<sup>151</sup> “Дорогие друзья, прошло уже 65 лет, но в российских городах по-прежнему ярко горит Вечный огонь – символ нашей жизни, символ нашей памяти о героическом прошлом. И год от года таких памятников становится не меньше, а больше.”

For the first time in the period studied, the president refers to a foreign place during his delivery. When evaluating the outcomes of the War, Medvedev cites Nuremberg as the place where the “vaccination” against Nazism took place, in reference to the trials of the Nazi leadership. Likewise, the president mentions the international structures capable of guaranteeing peace and safety in the contemporary world. This international outlook brings both domestic and foreign audience together, although the emphasis on “international structures” as a safeguard for global stability probably relates to the warning against “pretension to world domination” expressed at the beginning of the Speech.<sup>152</sup> The leader then highlights that the parading of Russian military units along with those of the CIS and Allied countries is “clear evidence” of their solidarity and understanding.<sup>153</sup> In a similar vein, he describes the Victory as “our common victory. The victory of good over evil, of justice over iniquity”, symbolically equating several aspects in a common thread. Addressing the veterans one last time, Medvedev thanks them for giving “peace, life and a free country, a free nation”, finishing the speech with a surprisingly straightforward, almost naïve “we love you”. This unlikely display of affection is attuned to Medvedev’s trait of providing the War an intimate tone, at the same time relating it to the collective entity embodied by the country; the emotional content of the deliverances acts as a bridge between official and personal elements. The Victory thus comes as a consequence of individual zeal in defending both family and motherland, regardless of generation.<sup>154</sup>

The year of 2011 marks the last year with Medvedev as the president of the Russian Federation, and, in consequence, his last VD Speeches. The process of “hiding” Lenin’s mausoleum continued throughout Medvedev’s years, to the extent that the structure mounted this year not only covered it completely, but also extended higher than the Kremlin walls. In fact, during Medvedev’s presidency, the decoration of the Square itself became increasingly grandiose each year, featuring particularly big billboards in 2010 and 2011 (Kassa Bravo 2011; Viacheslav Tciplenkov 2015c). Furthermore, the entire composition seems to carefully avoid any connotation of Soviet symbology (periskop 2011); in the previous year the Order of Alexander Nevsky, honouring one of the country’s first “defender[s]”, lost its Soviet symbols. Finally, it is also worth noticing that this year the soldiers paraded in battledress duty uniforms, instead of the traditional dress uniforms; like in 2005, during this year’s parade the Russian leadership remained seated for most of the time (Kassa Bravo 2011).

---

<sup>152</sup> “Итог войны заключается и в прививке от нацизма, которая была сделана всему миру в Нюрнберге. А также в создании международных структур, способных обеспечить мир и безопасность на планете.”

<sup>153</sup> “То, что сегодня в победном марше вместе прошли войска России, воинские формирования стран СНГ, государств антигитлеровской коалиции, – всё это очевидное свидетельство нашей солидарности и понимания”

<sup>154</sup> “Победа в 1945 году – это наша общая победа. Победа добра над злом, справедливости над беззаконием [...] Дорогие ветераны! [...] подарили людям, всем нам мир, жизнь и свободную страну, свободную Родину. Спасибо вам большое за это. Мы вас любим.”



Now a seasoned speaker on the topic, the president begins the **Speech at the Parade (2011)** by reflecting on the “deepening” of the “awareness of the great exploits of the military generation”. After an interval of a few years, the interpretation of the War and the Victory as a “living” narrative becomes explicit one more time (it was present during SR 2006 and SP 2007, 2008). Besides, he unequivocally declares that “contemporary Russia has a special relation to the happenings of those years, both to the historical chronicle and the veterans’ fate”. As such, “there is no doubt” that the newer generations will “sacredly revere (sanctify)” the memory of the War heroes.<sup>155</sup>

After praising the veterans for setting the “highest moral standard” by showing devotion to the fatherland, the president declares it to be “our duty” to preserve this memory and to protect the peace “achieved as a result of the Victory”. In a sense, peace here refers not to the end of the conflict with the capitulation of the Nazi Germany, but rather to a more abstract, long-lasting peace kept since then. This time there is an implicit temporal dimension, whose extension only raises the moral worth in making a connection between the peace of 1945, at one extreme, and current peace, at another. Medvedev expands the “us”—as referred to when mentioning “our duty”—to the people of all the nations that celebrate the Victory Day with the Russian people, reaffirming the practice of the Victory as a “common Victory”.<sup>156</sup>

Medvedev locates “pride” in the fact that those who survived the War promoted a fast recovery of the country “from the ruins”, became “the first to break through to outer space” and achieved “great success in education, culture and science”.<sup>157</sup> This original perspective broadens the Victory narrative, which now entails post-War accomplishments.

Medvedev then proceeds to state Russia’s support for international cooperation, “systematically advocating an indivisible defence system”—connected with 2010’s plea for a common European Security Treaty.<sup>158</sup> At the same time the president comments on Russia’s armed forces, assuring the audience of its reliable protection of the country and its citizens and promising to keep them updated—a remark also present during SR 2009.<sup>159</sup> The president concludes by thanking those who

---

<sup>155</sup> “Чем дальше от нас эти годы, тем глубже осознание великого подвига военного поколения [...] В современной России особое отношение к событиям тех лет: и к историческим хроникам, и к судьбам фронтовиков. [...] И нет никаких сомнений, что наши дети, наши внуки будут свято чтить память героев Великой Отечественной.”

<sup>156</sup> “Вы, дорогие ветераны, задали высочайшую нравственную планку – показали пример преданности своему Отечеству. Наш долг – помнить об этом и беречь мир, достигнутый в результате Победы. [...] Сейчас новые поколения укрепляют традиции дружбы, сотрудничества, братства с теми народами, которые вместе с нами отмечают праздник Победы. И я искренне поздравляю ветеранов всех стран: День Победы был и останется нашим общим праздником.”

<sup>157</sup> “Мы гордимся тем, что люди, прошедшие войну, за короткое время подняли страну из руин, восстановили промышленность и сельское хозяйство, первыми прорвались в космос, достигли больших успехов в образовании, науке и культуре.”

<sup>158</sup> “Сегодня Россия твёрдо отстаивает принципы мирного сотрудничества, последовательно выступает за неделимую систему безопасности”

<sup>159</sup> “Российские армия и флот надёжно защищают страну и её граждан. Наши солдаты и офицеры и сегодня несут боевое дежурство, а их товарищи сейчас пройдут по Красной площади. [...] Государство и дальше будет делать

“gave us life and freedom”, claiming that “you (veterans) were fully aware of what you were fighting for and for what your fellows gave their life”. In this year, Medvedev’s characteristic praise of personal initiative and commitment as decisive in setting the outcome of the conflict goes together with a connection between those that survived it and those who perished—the totality of the Soviet fighters forms a cohesive entity in which a part of it sacrificed itself for the rest, thus accomplishing its “historical mission” (SR 2008). Finally, it is important to notice that, for the first time, a Speech at the Parade does not address any threat, warning or lesson; instead, the wartime generation and the Victory represent an inspiration for the current period.

Unfortunately, I could not find a transcription of the **Speech at the Reception (2011)**. Still, mass media reported the event, highlighting that Medvedev remembered the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the War and that “this kind of atrocity never remain unpunished”. The president also draws attention to the fact that the “threat of conflict”, in particular “international terrorism”, still exists, and that humankind should fight it together. Terrorism is mentioned for the first time since SP and SR 2005, as, in January 2011, suicide bombers attacked the Domodedovo International Airport in Moscow in the biggest incident of the kind since the Beslan school crisis in 2004. Also mentioned is the presidential observation on the necessity to develop the armed forces (Medvedev 2011).

Since the beginning of Medvedev’s administration, Russia’s political framework was such that no major changes could occur within the established discursive order. The stabilization present in the early Putin period resulted in, by the end of the decade, the stagnation of the articulatory processes engineered by the country’s leadership. The evident failure of most of Medvedev’s reformist platform attests to the difficulty the president had in articulating new elements with the structure organized around “normalcy”. The problematic relation between the agenda of “modernization” and the major signifiers already present in this structure meant that the president was not successful in incorporating this principle into the discursive order, despite his enthusiastic support of this policy from the outset. First, the association of modernization with “great power” was vague at best, and Medvedev missed opportunities to strengthen it—as the complete lack of references to modernization during the VD Speeches shows. As manifest critical of the concept of “sovereign democracy”, Medvedev had also declared his willingness to work on “common standards of democracy” with his western counterparts (Morozov 2010:5). Along with “modernization”, this orientation discarded the country’s “uniqueness” as detrimental to the development of the country. In fact, they both stood in direct opposition to “conservatism” and even “Russianness”, inasmuch as these two became closely linked

---

всё, чтобы военнослужащие были достойно обеспечены, чтобы активно шло обновление Вооружённых Сил [...] Дорогие ветераны! Сегодня мы отмечаем самый святой для нас праздник и благодарим вас – вас, подаривших нам жизнь и свободу. Вы твёрдо знали, за что воевали и за что отдали жизнь ваши товарищи.”

under the previous ruler. Finally, the reformist platform could not be associated with “stability”. On that account, the programme of economic diversification and fight against corruption would affect the very foundations of the prevailing economic and political order, based on oil and gas revenues entering the state budget and being subsequently distributed among loyal sectors of the elite and society as a whole. The most important obstacle to the implementation of the platform, however, was perhaps the underlying aversion evoked by the transitional period of the 1990s, remaining a fundamental factor in the country’s discursive order since then. In this context, “modernization”, attended by a feeble “liberalization” which negated sovereign democracy, was essentially at odds with the prevalent understanding of “normalcy”.

At the same time, the VD discourse also solidified its structures of meaning. Although Medvedev still used the commemoration to address political issues in the country and abroad, he avoided associating it with concrete events, focusing on its “unifying” function instead. As the Victory narrative gained (even more) prominence in the Russian wider symbolic order, the current president resorts to categorical statements more frequently than his predecessor, often without providing them with a justification. In this regard, the leadership suggested a consensus on the significance of the War and the Victory, and Medvedev in practice started to involve each citizen of the Russian Federation at a personal level. In addition, the president tried to reconcile the Russian GPW with the wider WWII memory, in light of the renewed attempt at rapprochement with its western counterparts, in particular with NATO member states. This approach required an awkward balance with the still popular “uniqueness”; as such, the usual procedure was to bring alternative perspectives on the War closer to the Russian GPW/VD version rather than integrating them all—as expressed by the recurrent emphasis on the CIS countries as privileged subjects of the narrative. While the narrative continued to develop a symbolism of its own—from 2008-2011, the Soviet Union was mentioned only once—it did not include a conciliatory stance as its core—this mention served to reiterate that “we, Soviet (heirs)” suffered the most from the War (SP 2010).

Against this background, a new momentum started to take shape by the time of the 2011 legislative elections. While Medvedev’s modernizing platform was frustrated by the dominant discourse on “normalcy”, it also engendered a loosening of this discursive order. The vacuum left by unmet demands uncovered a potentially dislocatory practice, as these demands found their expression in a reinvigorated opposition that had earlier been marginalized from traditional party politics. Outside official political procedures, this “non-systemic” opposition also operated along the “normalcy” discursive structure—albeit other than that of the political leadership. In the aftermath of the unsuccessful projects to promote modernization, liberalization and finding a solution to the bureaucracy’s endemic corruption, the elements supporting the Russian “unique” way of keeping

“stability” were promptly inversed in the eyes of a growing share of the civil society, understanding it rather as a stubborn “isolation” which promoted nothing but “inertia”. Moreover, the impending return of the old leader to the highest position of power—given Russia’s political configuration, a mere formality in a power-switching operation between Putin and Medvedev—further aggravated the estrangement the leadership provoked among this group. Finally, the slow recovery from the economic crisis provided a pressing material stimulus to go out and protest.

Nevertheless, this coalition encompassed a multitude of political demands and orientations, apart from the unifying banner of removing the current leadership from power. Essentially an “anti-Putin” articulation, it fitted well in the leadership’s logic of equating all as “extremists” and “xenophobes” (i.e. enemies of stability”). Accordingly, as occurred during the offensive against the supporters of the colour revolutions and of the embryonic protests of 2006-2008, this discursive practice was heavily sponsored by the state-controlled media, resonating with the most conservative sectors of society. By disseminating a “diffuse” threat to the established order, this “negative mobilization” (Gudkov 2007) simply replicated a formula present in the VD Speeches (among other pronouncements) since the second half of the 2000s. From its beginning, a “depolitisation of social life” (Prozorov 2008:199) had become a distinctive trait of Putin’s period; the leadership stimulated an apathetic society (idem. 200), which already shared a “positive indifference” (idem. 188) towards president Putin—at least during his first years. In view of the “normalcy” project based on the symbolic overcoming of the 1990s, the leadership by definition deemed a “return of the political” in the country and its civil society to be “disastrous” (idem. 199).

Apart from “anti-Putinism”, “nationalism” also played a major role in the common ground unifying the heterogeneous movement, to the extent that even the “liberal” identity had taken a “national-democratic” turn, dubbed *natsdem* (Laruelle 2012). While it could compete for the “Russianness” side of the discursive field, it could also be explored by the ever-latent “Nazi/fascist threat”. Even if real fascism was supported by a tiny—albeit vocal—minority (as the then-banned National-Bolshevik Party, a fusion of both extremes of the political spectrum), this was hardly the case for most of the protesters, and a great share struggled instead for the agenda the elite was unwilling—and Medvedev ostensibly unable—to promote. And yet, accusations of fascism were often directed at opposition members, in particular Alexey Navalny, a prominent opposition leader whose participation in far-right demonstrations was conveniently exploited by the state-run media. As a “flexible ideological tool”, nationalism is not a prerogative of Putin’s regime (Laruelle 2012:5), nor, arguably, a part of the main signifiers of its system of meanings. Although “patriotism” is a recurrent topic in Russia’s leadership, “Russianness” relates to the broader sociocultural aspects regarding a way of life, instead of relying on principles of an ethnic community bound by blood and/or language. Similarly, the term

“*rossiysky*”, regarding the civic aspects of the Russian identity (the federation, the government, the army, the citizens) is often employed; by contrast, the term “*russky*”, which relates to the Russian ethnicity, appears only once during the entire period analysed: at SR 2000, an unseasoned Putin praises the “Russian (*russky*) patriotism”. In this respect, the post-Soviet (CIS) “brotherhood” is a persistent motif in the VD Speeches (SP 2001, 2003-05, 2009; SR 2000-01). As a multi-ethnic country of (bi)continental proportions, Russia’s “stability”, “great power(ness)” and even “uniqueness” would be eroded by an exclusivist nationalist discourse. Nonetheless, these two (if not more) strains of nationalism coexist, and the popularity of its not-officially-sanctioned versions reveals another point of divergence between the symbolic order promoted by the leaderships and that of the national identity at large.

Notwithstanding its failure in preventing Putin from coming to—or remaining in—power, the 2011-12 protests showed that, for the first time since the 1990s, the leadership’s control over the discursive articulation, along with its status as a promoter of “normalcy”, was significantly contested from within it. The non-systemic opposition succeeded in expressing its discontent also at an official level. As a result, the political party designed by the leadership (“the party of power”), United Russia, received a substantial reduction in votes and seats at the Duma, the country’s lower legislative house. Unlike when dealing with the “terrorists”, the Russian leadership could not promptly “otherize” a considerable part of the country’s civil society, since the renewed opposition was able to effectively claim symbolic sites of political action, asserting that “we are not the opposition, we are the people!” (Morozov 2012:2).

#### *4.3.4 Putin’s third term (2012-2015)*

Putin’s extravagant inauguration to his third term, held on May 7 as per tradition, was preceded by a particularly tense protest against the old new ruler, which in turn met vigorous repression—including massive arrests by police and the opening of questionable criminal cases against opposition leaders in its aftermath. The government’s severe crackdown on the protesters ensued a new wave of domestic and international criticism in respect to Russia’s “sovereign democracy”. In fact, against the background of anxiety among the elite, the president dismissed creator and main proponent of the concept, Vladislav Surkov. The a suggestive move also indicated the increasing detachment of the elite from the society, which in turn reflected the widening back between its discursive practices and the national symbolic order as a whole. The president started his third term with one of his lowest approval rating since the 2004-2005 monetization of benefits for the elderly (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2015).

Despite the fact that the conciliatory turn adopted during Medvedev's rule also was cautiously embraced by Putin, who in 2010 went as far as to propose "a harmonious economic community from Lisbon to Vladivostok" (Deutsche Welle, 2010), the United States and most EU countries received the return of the leader's with renewed scepticism. The impossibility to reach an agreement on emerging international challenges, from the nuclear projects in Iran to the Syrian and Libyan civil wars, was a clear indicator of the delicate situation of Russia-US relations.

In contrast to the country political configuration, the VD ritual remained its trajectory above and beyond politics; for the most part, even the "non-systemic" opposition was not contesting its narrative orthodoxy. It is emblematic that even the most marginalized groups use the War tropes on behalf of their cause; the motto "fascism/they shall not pass"—a main signifier of the Soviet GPW propaganda (Gill 2010:142)—is often employed during protests for the rights of the LGBT community (aprobalt 2013). Nevertheless, some opposition members in fact contested its status in the country's collective imaginary. The politician Gennady Gudkov—already when he still was a member of Putin's United Russia—argued that the War is justified as a teleological "chain of events leading up to pre-determined Victory" which "taboos" its negative side and removes it from "rational analysis" (Gudkov 2005). Considering the official reading introduced by the Speeches, after 5 years this "taboo" surrounding the topic presumably grew stronger. Accordingly, it still represented a reliable source of legitimation of the regime, mediating its discursive practices with that of the national symbolic order (i.e. the country's "identity").

On the morning of 9 May 2012, the nationwide Channel 1 broadcasted a special documentary making a retrospect of all the military parades starting from 7 November 1941 until VD 2012 and the 138th military parade to take place at the Red Square (Channel One 2012). By connecting the early 1941 Parade to those of 9 May, it conspicuously omits its purpose—the celebration of the October Revolution. In the same vein, VD 2012 continues to move away from its communist past, as this year there was not USSR Marshall among the authorities, and the Soviet banners were further replaced by new ones, featuring Christian crosses (periskop 2012a).

Putin's **Speech at the Parade (2012)** present a few changes—if not so much on its content, at least on the emphasis given to certain aspects of it. As during his first years, Putin returns to focusing on the War significance in ongoing affairs, albeit in a more subtle manner. Commemorating the day when the "terrible and cynical force" of Nazism was defeated, Putin fast-forwards to our time, claiming, "we don't have the right to forget [...] how the barbarians decided to destroy entire nations". The leader locates the roots of the conflict in the absence of a "timely, collective rejection", which was

prevented due to “disunity, mutual suspicions and ideological confrontation” between countries.<sup>160</sup> Accordingly, the president lists the “strict abidance to the international rules, respect for the sovereignty of the states and independent choices of each nation” among the “absolute guarantees” that a similar tragedy will not happen again.<sup>161</sup> As the “reset” was waning in view of the return of Putin’s less agreeable persona, the president rebuffed the foreign disapproval of his rule as based on “suspicions” and “ideological confrontation”. Before that, the term was only used during SP 2005, and yet to praise the level of international cooperation achieved after the period of ideological opposition, a reference to the Cold War.

In justifying Russia’s “great moral right” to defend its positions, the president succinctly expresses all the tropes of the GPW/VD saga in one sentence. Therefore, the country is entitled to this right for the reason that it “bore the brunt of Nazism”, “met it with heroic resistance”, “passed through the hardest tests”, “determined the outcome of that war”, “crushed the enemy” and “brought liberation of the nations of the entire world”. As a “powerful support to the younger generations”, they “must know and remember [the Victory], that they are the heir of the winners, [who are] the true soldiers of freedom”.<sup>162</sup>

Next, Putin proceeds to commend on the veterans’ brotherhood, as they experienced deprivation and suffering “which, it would seem, human beings cannot withstand”. As the real “creators of the Victory”, they proved that it is possible to win not only by the power of weapons, but [also] by the power of the spirit, unity and faith”.<sup>163</sup> Whilst the War is now history, their “courage, ability to love and defend their motherland” will never become past, remaining a “touchstone of morality, patriotism and duty” to the new generations, who will proudly march the on the “legendary” Red Square in respect to those who “gave us the Victory”. Although the event itself is now gone, the underlying circumstances are atemporal, still guiding the nation—the concrete is history; the metaphysical is

---

<sup>160</sup> “67 лет назад был разгромлен нацизм – страшная и циничная сила. И мы не вправе забывать [...] Как варвары замыслили уничтожить целые народы [...] Надо ещё раз открыто признать, что агрессивные намерения нацистов не получили своевременного коллективного отпора. Что разобщённость стран, их взаимные подозрения и идеологическая конфронтация не позволили предотвратить Вторую мировую войну.”

<sup>161</sup> “Все мы обязаны помнить, почему началась война, и анализировать её уроки, ведь они по-прежнему актуальны. И сегодня хочу подчеркнуть: строгое соблюдение международных норм, уважение государственного суверенитета и самостоятельного выбора каждого народа – это одна из безусловных гарантий того, что трагедия прошедшей войны никогда больше не повторится.”

<sup>162</sup> “Россия последовательно проводит политику по укреплению безопасности в мире. И у нас есть великое моральное право – принципиально и настойчиво отстаивать свои позиции, потому что именно наша страна приняла на себя главный удар нацизма, встретила его героическим сопротивлением, прошла через тяжелейшие испытания, определила сам исход той войны, сокрушила врага и принесла освобождение народам всего мира. В этой победе и мощная опора для молодых поколений, которые должны знать и помнить, что они – наследники победителей, истинных солдат свободы.”

<sup>163</sup> “Дорогие наши ветераны! Через всю войну вы прошли в едином строю, в едином братстве и вместе вынесли такие трудности, такие лишения и муки, какие человек, казалось, выдержать не может. Но вы не покорились врагу и стали настоящими творцами Победы. Вы [...] вновь доказали, что побеждать можно не только силой оружия, но и силой духа, сплочённости и веры.

timeless. The legendary Square is complementary to the legendary Red Army (SR 2000) and the life of its veterans (SR 2004).<sup>164</sup>

The President begins the **Speech at the Reception (2012)** by establishing a connection with the audience based on the common memory, since “today we experience the same feelings”. These feelings, however, have definite expression in a community “overwhelmed with pride for its country, which destroyed Nazism, [and] for its great people, who won the battle (fight)” unparalleled in history. “[At the same time,] we mourn millions who perished on that ruthless war”, he complements. As during SP 2001, this opposition reveals the combination of contradictory feelings that the VD ritual evokes. The president then asserts its meaning: “we will always remember at what cost the War was won”. Furthermore, he argues, “we will not forgive the criminal atrocities of our enemy, who treacherously attacked our motherland”.<sup>165</sup> Even if directed towards a public predisposed to such a dramatic presentation of the War, the unreserved rhetoric of the Russia’s main authority in such a solemn setting hints at the level of consensus the GPW gathered around it.

As previously claimed by Medvedev (SP 2010), “each family has its heroes and its memories”; this memory is alive in the “most truthful and popular holiday”. The Victory Day is, “above all”—Putin now speaks to the veterans—“your day”. Accordingly, their fate sets an example for all the generations of “our big and multinational country”, and their solidarity became “our priceless heritage”. In this vein, the “we will do everything possible” to make the new generations aware of “their responsibility for the future of Russia”, and contribute to the development of “tradition of unity and authentic patriotism”—as such, “we will not betray the sacred truth of the War”.<sup>166</sup> As during his first term (SR 2003) and during Medvedev (SR 2008) Putin mentions a “truth of (about) the War”—

---

<sup>164</sup> “Великая Отечественная война стала историей, но ваше мужество, умение любить и защищать свою Родину никогда не уйдут в прошлое, будут мерилом нравственности, патриотизма и долга для детей, внуков и правнуков. Сегодня они тоже держат равнение на Знамя Победы и с гордостью пройдут военным маршем по легендарной Красной площади. Пройдут в знак глубочайшего уважения к тем, кто подарил нам этот Великий день”

<sup>165</sup> “Сегодня все мы испытываем одинаковые чувства. Нас переполняет гордость за свою страну, разгромившую нацизм, за наш великий народ, победивший в битве, равной которой не знала история. И мы скорбим о миллионах погибших в той беспощадной войне, о тех, кто навечно остался на полях сражений и под руинами городов, на пепелищах тысяч сёл и деревень. [...] Мы всегда будем помнить, какой ценой завоёвана Победа. Не забудем преступных злодеяний врага, вероломно напавшего на нашу Родину.”

<sup>166</sup> “Сейчас везде, в России, в странах Содружества, в дальнем зарубежье отмечают наш общий праздник. И в каждой семье есть и свои герои, и свои воспоминания. Такой этот день – День Победы! Самый правдивый и самый народный. День благодарности и поклонения нашим дорогим ветеранам. 9 Мая – это, уважаемые ветераны, прежде всего ваш день. [...] Ваша [ветеранов] судьба – пример для всех поколений нашей большой, многонациональной страны. А ваше бескорыстное братство стало нашим бесценным наследием. [...] И мы сделаем всё возможное, чтобы и они [наши дети и внуки] осознавали свою ответственность за судьбу России и вносили свой вклад в развитие традиций сплочённости и подлинного патриотизма. [...] Мы никогда не изменим вашим заветам – любить, беречь и защищать Россию, не изменим священной правде о войне.”



a treasure carried by the veterans, preserved by their heirs to be further transmitted to posterity. While the heirs of the Victory exist, its memory prevails.

The contention between the country's leadership and its American counterparts continued throughout the period, as symbolized by the Magnitsky Act (consisting of targeted sanctions against Russian authorities), and its Russian reverse, the Anti-Magnitsky Act (a series of sanctions on American citizens, most notoriously the ban on their adoption of Russian orphans), both approved by the end of 2012. At the same time, however, the American bill lifted several sanctions in force against Russia since RSFSR (the Jackson–Vanik amendment), which did not attract the same attention in the country. In the following month, Putin welcomed the French actor Gerard Depardieu as a new Russian citizen, a gesture much advertised by a media keen on “anti-Western” publicity stunts.

As the opposition movement began to lose its momentum, it would seem that the confrontational rhetoric served to connect it with an increasingly hostile “West”—and its ideals with what Zhurzhenko (2007) calls “pro-Western defeatism”. After Medvedev’s hiatus, this perspective returns to the concept of sovereign democracy by associating civic movements and their proposals with an attempt, by western countries, to promote regime changes through “soft absorption” (Surkov 2006). After the 2011-12 protests, the regime replaced its emphasis on unifying symbols with a tactic of producing new divisions among society (Kurilla 2014). The laws passed to curb “homosexual propaganda”, to “protect religious feelings” (and the related trial of the Pussy Riot), against the “falsification of history”, against the “promotion of fascism” and even minor restrictions such as the anti-tobacco law can all be framed under this renewed impulse to regulate social life (Kurilla 2014:1; Siegert 2014:10). The leadership’s main discursive practice shifted from a logics of equivalence to one of difference: instead of uniting all the Russians against a common threat such as terrorism, the logics of difference served for promoting policies supported by an “overwhelming majority” (Siegert 2014:10) at the same time that it provoked “splits within Russian society” (Kurilla 2014:1).

Nevertheless, this state of affairs and the strained relation with the “Western” countries did not damage the 2013 Victory ritual. For the first time, the naval Parade held in Vladivostok included French and American vessels as participants (Periskop 2013c). In Moscow, besides the demonstration of the heavy artillery in the Red Square, officially and definitely reinstated as part of the celebration since 2008, there was a record in the military aircrafts flying Moscow’s skies on that day. After a two-year gap, 68 planes and helicopters performed a full air parade, one for each year separating VD 2013 from the day of the Nazi capitulation (RT na russkom 2013). Another visible novelty was that, after 12 years, a military officer was inspecting (hosting) the troops, as General Sergey Shoygu had become the country’s new Minister of Defence (periskop 2013c). The **Speech at the Parade (2013)**, in turn, lacked context-specific elements, keeping to the established protocols. Putin starts by greeting those

present for “the day of glory of our nation, [which] smashed Nazism”. This memory represents a “sacred relation” between generations; its strength lies in the love for Russia, for one’s home and family—“the entire nation fought heroically” for these values. As members of the large family of the winners and their heirs—factor consistently present in the Speeches since 2008—they will always remember that “namely Russia, the Soviet Union” destroyed the Nazi plan. This choice of words fall very short of merging both political entities into one, but not quite—while in English this is not clear, in the original version “destroyed” (*sorvali*) is in plural. The clumsy syntax is due to historical accuracy. Until now, the adverb<sup>167</sup> “namely” (*imanno*) has always been followed by a vaguer “our country” (SP 2004, 2012). Considering the circumstances, if the particle were followed only by “Russia”, it would be false; if it were followed by “Soviet Union” alone, it would imply a problematic equivalence. In any case, it denotes thin lines that separate the two entities. In any case, the point stands: Russia itself defeated Nazism, not by inheritance but by a common factor uniting abstract political realities (states) and their mnemonic communities (generations) throughout—and apart from—time.<sup>168</sup>

The leader continues: “*our* soldier stood up for freedom and independence, defended our motherland, set Europe free and conquered victory”; his greatness “will stay in history forever”. Described in the singular, this soldier is not a particular individual. He is, at the same time, an archetype of valiant behaviour and a member of the community bound by the aforementioned “sacred relation”. As a generalization, he stands for *each* of its members.<sup>169</sup>

Concerning the living veterans, Putin pledges to eternally honour their feat, mourn those killed and always defend the “truth of the war”, as in the previous year. He proceeds “we remember what he tragedies of a war means [...] [and we] will do anything, *anything* [he repeats], in order that no one ever dared to unleash it [a war] again”.<sup>170</sup> While there have been manifestations of this sort before (SP 2003, 2005, 2012; SR 2010), this vague—and somewhat intimidating—statement contrasts with the “lessons” of the War present until 2010. Likewise, Putin closes his speech referring to the Victory as an “alarm ring” urging for a “life without war”. As such, it is a “holy symbol of the loyalty towards

---

<sup>167</sup> Grammatically, it is a particle in Russian.

<sup>168</sup> “С днём славы нашего народа, сокрушившего нацизм! [...] память о ней не меркнет, передаётся от поколения к поколению [...] И главной силой такого святого родства является любовь к России, к родному дому, к своим близким, к своей семье. Эти ценности объединяют нас и сегодня. За них героически сражался весь наш народ. Мы всегда будем помнить, что именно Россия, Советский Союз сорвали человеконенавистнические, кровавые, надменные планы нацистов”

<sup>169</sup> “Наш солдат отстоял свободу и независимость, защищая свою Родину, не жалея себя, освободил Европу и одержал победу, величие которой навеки останется в истории”

<sup>170</sup> “Мы будем вечно чтить ваш подвиг, скорбеть о погибших и замученных, всегда отстаивать правду о войне [...] Мы помним, что значит трагедия войны, и сделаем всё – всё, чтобы никто и никогда не посмел её вновь развязать”

the motherland [...] [the] union of the multinational people of Russia [...] and boundless devotion to its roots and its history”.<sup>171</sup>

The president begins the **Speech at the Reception (2013)** by describing Russia’s honourable deed of honouring of “victorious generation”, as well as for “the great humanism” of the Victory, which “affirms the intrinsic value of human life”. This “humanism” is a complete outsider to the set of tropes associated with the Victory for the entire period of this analysis so far. Its distinctness challenges an assumption: the lack of respect for human rights in the victorious society and its heirs.<sup>172</sup>

This time, Putin presents the Victory as equally commemorated by the CIS countries, several countries in Europe and around the world, since “millions of people experience similar feelings: joy and sorrow, excitement, admiration for the feat of those victorious over War, evil, falsehood and injustice”. On that account, a chain of equivalence links everything that was defeated. When specifically addressing the veterans, Putin’s prose becomes lyrical: “you had a common fate, a common tribulation, a common hope and a common homeland [...] [fought] for the sake of its future and “your” children’s”.<sup>173</sup> As during SP 2011, the president also praises the veterans for recovering the country “from ruins and ashes” and executing “huge labour achievements”. Present-time Russians will always “cherish this legacy, admire your generosity and courage, of which you speak simply and clearly ‘it could not be otherwise’”. This last sentence, which could also be translated as “it was impossible otherwise”, is a common Russian idiom—an exemplary quotation for the Victory teleology, bearing an undisguised fatalism. According to the leader, “this deep, selfless attitude to life touches the soul”. Next, he argues that the veterans considered “patriotism, faith and love for the country” as their “main values”, which even today unite the peoples of Russia, and shall remain its “spiritual and moral support”.<sup>174</sup> Accordingly, the leader is not only reaffirming the veteran’s heroic

---

<sup>171</sup> “Победа в мае 45-го – это набат, утверждающий жизнь без войны, это святой символ верности Родине, которая живёт в каждом из нас, символ единства многонационального народа России, его безграничной преданности своим корням и своей истории”

<sup>172</sup> “Сегодня вся Россия стоит в почётном, гордом, благодарном карауле в честь поколения победителей, в честь наших отцов и дедов, освободивших мир от нацизма, в честь великого гуманизма – гуманизма победы, утвердившей непреходящую ценность человеческой жизни.”

<sup>173</sup> “Этот праздник торжественно отмечают в государствах Содружества, во многих странах Европы и мира. Миллионы людей испытывают сейчас схожие чувства: радость и скорбь, волнение, преклонение перед подвигом победивших войну, зло, неправду и несправедливость. [...] Вам, нашим ветеранам, – главные и самые тёплые поздравления. У вас была одна судьба, одна беда, одна надежда и одна Отчизна. Ради её независимости, ради будущего своих детей .”

<sup>174</sup> “Вы не только отстояли страну, но и восстановили её из руин и пепла, достигли огромных трудовых свершений. [...] И это наследие мы всегда будем беречь, восхищаться вашим благородством и мужеством, вашей судьбой, о которой вы говорите просто и ясно: «Иначе было нельзя». Такое глубокое, самоотверженное, без доли пафоса отношение к жизни переворачивает душу. Патриотизм, веру в свою страну, любовь к Отечеству вы считали главными ценностями. Они и сегодня сплачивают народы России и, уверен, всегда будут нашей духовной и нравственной опорой.”

deeds—he is speaking on behalf of the heroes themselves; at the same time, he addresses them in a much more direct manner than before, suggesting a personal talk.

In June, the friction in the Russia-US relations was aggravated when Russia granted a temporary asylum to Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee wanted for leaking classified information from American security agencies. Nonetheless, in the end of December, the social, political and cultural divergences in the Ukrainian society gave rise to a new crisis in that country, leading to an unprecedented level of tension between Russian and the NATO/EU countries. To a certain degree, it was a repetition of Orange Revolution of 2004-2005, but this with much wider implications for the entire region. Yanukovich, who at the time had lost the election due to a revote, was elected the country's president in 2010; this not only reflected that the divide in society was still alive, but also that practices within the country's elite reflected this situation. The new president was taking concrete steps for a future accession to the European Union, a fact the Russian leadership was following closely, pressuring for the accession to the Russian-led Eurasian Union instead. Consequently, Yanukovich's unexpected decision of not signing the EU Accession Agreement sparked a wave of protests by pro-EU citizens, many of which were also dismissive of the Soviet identity and the Russian influence in the country. From the end of November until February of the following year, several people camped in Kiev's central square, in what came to be known as "(Euro)maidan". The protest soon escalated into an urban conflict, ensuing violent clashes between the population and its organized "self-defence" groups with an increasingly repressive police—leading up to tens of casualties. Against this unpredictable scenario, the Ukrainian parliament voted to remove Yanukovich from the post as the president fled to Russia amid the protests. In the western and central regions of Ukraine, pro-maidan activists started to overthrow local authorities, at the same time that forces supporting the government in the Eastern parts of the country rouse against what they saw as a NATO-backed "fascist coup". The situation was particularly acute in the Crimean peninsula, where its large Russian majority installed self-defence groups against the new interim government in Kiev, later being joined by unidentified troops, which were later revealed to be members of the Russian Special Forces—also dubbed "little green man" or, according to the Russian leadership, "polite people". In a swift and widely contested operation, a referendum took place in the peninsula in March, resulting in massive support for joining the Russian Federation—what the Kremlin officialised soon afterwards. In a similar fashion, pro-Moscow groups controlling parts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in Eastern Ukraine soon became separatist combatants fighting Kiev's "anti-terrorist operation" launched to remove them. A long conflict ensued between the Ukrainian military and the separatists, which soon declared independent "people's republics" in the region.

The conflict represented a complete new setting on the relations between Ukraine, Russia and the NATO countries. As supporters of opposite sides of what escalated into a (low/medium-intensity) regional conflict, the relation between Russia and its western counterparts reached its lowest point in the post-Cold War order. NATO and EU countries applied targeted sanctions against members of the Russia's leadership, which in turn imposed an embargo on foodstuff imports from these countries. Mutual accusations of military support on the Ukrainian conflict abounded, and an intervention by Russian troops was likely to be decisive in keeping the separatist republics apart from Ukraine.

Regardless of the causes and motivations behind the parties, the War and its narrative played a major role the discourse of the separatists, who argued for defending its memories against Bandera's supporters, in reference to the Ukrainian nationalist that fought the Soviets in Western Ukraine, pragmatically collaborating with Nazi Germany on its struggle for the country's independence. Accordingly, billboards linking the current conflict with 1941 started to appear in Donetsk's streets (Vice News 2014a); in a more striking revival, the provisory government of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic reissued decrees originally used under martial law during GPW to prosecute its opponents (Vice News 2014b). Conversely, as the Saint George Ribbon became associated with the rebels, groups in post-Maidan Ukraine proposed to replace it with the British Red Poppy instead (5 Kanal 2014).

On the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, the official justification was that the new regime after Euromaidan was threatening the interests of the Russian citizens living in the region, similarly to the rhetoric used for supporting the invasion of Georgia in 2008. Whereas this move received widespread criticism from many world leaders, particularly in Europe and North America, it was strongly acclaimed by the public opinion of the country, and the president's approval ratings saw a sharp increase, reaching its highest point since Putin came to power—over 80% (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2015). For most citizens of the Russian Federation, the country's energetic foreign policy revealed the world a “great power” defending its people (“Russianness”) against a revolutionary, fascist regime (“conservatism”, “stability”). Even the non-systemic opposition, for its nationalist part, came in support of the move—notably, the charismatic Alexey Navalny and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was prosecuted in the 2003 Yukos case (Illarionov 2014).

Consequently, the Parade on 9 May 2014 was a celebration of great magnitude, involving more than fifteen thousand members of the Russian Armed Forces. The air force broke a new record with 69 planes and helicopters—repeating the symbolism of the previous year, this time referring to the event's 69<sup>th</sup> anniversary (RT na russkom 2014). The Saint George's ribbon was on every vehicle; almost defiantly, this year Crimean armoured vehicles and the Russian Special Forces—the “polite

people”—paraded for the first time (periskop 2014). By contrast, several European leaders were absent in protest to the situation in Ukraine. Putin begins the **Speech at the Parade (2014)** by reaffirming that “9 May was, is and will [remain] our main celebration”, a day of national triumph and pride, sorrow and eternal memory; it makes “us” aware of “what it means to be faithful to the motherland, and of how important it is to be able to defend its interests”. Certainly, a statement on behalf of Russia’s foreign policy.<sup>175</sup>

The president then mentions specific events of the War, such as the blockade of Leningrad, the defence of Moscow and Stalingrad, and the advance in Kursk. Whereas this is element was present in SR (2000-01) and SP (2002, 2005, 2008-2010, 2013-14), this year Putin adds the “courage of the defenders of Sevastopol” to the list of War theatres worth remembering. The city reunited with—or annexed by—the RF, along with the Crimean peninsula, is presented as full member of the VD narrative.<sup>176</sup> As in the last years (SP 2003, 2004, 2010, 2012, 2013), Putin asserts that “namely *our* country” ultimately destroyed Nazism, and that “we” “will forever protect this saint, unfading truth”. Therefore, the “truth” here is not vague as in previous years, and is associated with USSR/Russia being the main victim of the War—as well as its main hero.<sup>177</sup>

Finally, the leader presents the “inextricable connection” between generations as a national asset. In honour of the veterans of the War, “we” offer not only flowers, fireworks and the Parade, but, most importantly, “the warmth from our hearts”. Putin continues his highly reverential and tone, extolling them as those who “entrusted us to keep the greatness of the “creation” of the Motherland, its “unity and [its] love”. Moreover, he pledges: “we will never let you [the veterans] down! We will protect Russia and its glorious history, to put, above all, our service to the fatherland”.<sup>178</sup>

This year the Speech at the Reception took place on 8 May. This was so because after the Victory Parade, Putin left Moscow and flew towards Sevastopol, to attend the local celebration in that city, a

---

<sup>175</sup> “[...] но 9 Мая был, есть и будет нашим главным праздником. Это день национального триумфа, народной гордости, день скорби и вечной памяти. [...] когда все мы особенно остро чувствуем, что значит быть верным Родине и как важно уметь отстаивать её интересы.”

<sup>176</sup> “[...] её [победу] приближали мужество блокадного Ленинграда, отвага защитников Севастополя, доблесть тысяч бойцов, непреклонно стоявших на своих рубежах. [...] Москвой и Сталинградом, на Курской дуге и Днепре определился исход всей Второй мировой войны.”

<sup>177</sup> “Именно наша страна гнала нацистов до их логова, добила их полного и окончательного разгрома, победила ценой миллионов жертв и страшных испытаний. Мы всегда будем беречь эту священную, немеркнущую правду, не допустим предательства и забвения героев, всех, кто не жалея себя сохранил мир на планете.”

<sup>178</sup> “Неразрывная связь поколений – наше огромное национальное богатство [...] Мы гордимся вами! [...] В этот великий день нет никого роднее, дороже вас. В вашу честь – цветы, салюты и мощь парадных расчётов, но главное – мы отдаём вам тепло наших сердец [...] [Вы] завещали нам держать эту высоту – высоту созидания, единства и любви к Родине. Мы вас никогда не подведём! Будем беречь Россию и её славную историю, ставить превыше всего служение Отечеству.”

hugely symbolic—and highly controversial—move. For this reason, I chose to present the Speech in Sevastopol, instead of the traditional SR.

On that account, Sevastopol and Crimea would witness a slightly different Victory Day celebration, represented by Putin, the Russian political establishment and its supporters as a new liberation, akin to that of 1945—or 1944, year of the peninsula’s liberation. This year, the acrobatic team of the air Parade left Moscow to join them in Sevastopol. During the **Speech at the Celebratory Concert (2014)**, Putin starts by highlighting the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Crimea’s liberation from the Nazi forces, taking place amid an “absolutely historical event”—the “unification of Sevastopol and Crimea with Russia”. Accordingly, the “Mother-land opened a wide embrace” to accept its new citizens as “native daughters and sons”. In a quick reference to the wider circumstances of this union, the president argues that “we respect all the countries”, as well as their “legitimate interests”; “but”, he continues, Russia’s “legitimate interests” must be respected in return, “including the restoration of historical justice and the right to self-determination”. Finally, the leader mentions a series of challenges for the new Russian land, assuring, however, that everything will be solved, because “we are together”. He then bids farewell in an unusually warm manner: “a hug, my dear ones!”<sup>179</sup>

The VD ritual reached its apex amid the tense international atmosphere. With the conspicuous absence of any reference to the international politics, the veterans and their legacy absorb all the attention of a nation in its glorious moment. During the summer, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine escalated, at the same time that Russia started to feel the insidious effects of the sanctions and international isolation. Nothing of this mattered to the public opinion; the levels of approval kept its high level, and even increased marginally. It appeared as if the country was, for the first time, “united” as its leader had hoped. Notwithstanding, there was indeed opposition against the country’s political atmosphere—as shown in February 2015, when thousands rallied to mourn the killing of the liberal opposition leader Boris Nemtsov.

The situation in Ukraine remained a sensitive issue with many ramifications, including a “heating” of the conflict during the summer, after several rounds of talks in Minsk (Belarus) between USA, EU, Ukraine, representatives of the rebels and Russia and successive failed attempts at a ceasefire, the

---

<sup>179</sup> В этом году этот праздник имеет особый характер – ровно 70 лет назад Крым был освобождён от немецко-фашистских захватчиков. И проходит праздник на фоне абсолютно исторического события – воссоединения Крыма Севастополя с Россией. [...] родина-мать открыла вам широкие объятия и приняла в свой дом как родных дочерей и сыновей. Мы с уважением относимся ко всем странам, ко всем народам, уважаем их законные права и интересы, но просим, чтобы все так же относились и к нашим законным интересам, включая восстановление исторической справедливости и право на самоопределение. [...] нужно восстановить экономику, поднять жизненный уровень людей, сделать ещё много-много полезных и нужных дел. Это непростая задача, но я уверен, что мы всё это сделаем, потому что мы – вместе. Обнимаю вас, дорогие мои. С праздником!

negotiations reached a standoff in a conflict that became “frozen”. At the same time, the preparations for Putin’s second 9 May Jubilee was conceived to be an impressive display of force and unity in commemorating the Victory’s 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A new generation of tanks, the “Armata”, was widely promoted to debut during the event—one of whose ominously broke at the middle of the Parade (Rossiya 24 2015). Like in 2010, CIS countries also paraded—Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan and Tadzhikistan. Furthermore, for the first time China, India, Serbia, and Mongolia joined the parading formations. Apparently also for the first time, a unit of women-cadets paraded. One last interesting circumstance was that the Victory Banner paraded in front of the Russian flag—for the first time since 2006 (periskop 2015).

As the Speech held 10 years before, the **Speech at the Parade (2015)** was particularly long, taking over then minutes. Putin confident voice begins his delivery by affirming that, on this day, “we again realise the enormity of the Victory over Nazism”, being proud that “our country” managed to destroy this “dark force”. Repeating many of the considerations introduced throughout the last fifteen years, he argues that Europe did not notice the “mortal” Nazi ideology straight away. Despite its recurrent presence on the Speeches, this remark gains a new dimension—at a moment that the Russian leadership ostensibly struggles against an emerging fascist menace in Europe, the president endeavours to gather international acceptance to his perspective on the Ukrainian crisis. The historical conflict, which involved “80 percent” of the world population, is still one that hit the Soviet Union the most, and, “naturally”, the Red Army marked its victorious conclusion in Berlin. As such, the last SP analysed in this work connects to the first one (SP 2000) in an allusion to the Red Army.<sup>180</sup>

In a highly suggestive passage, the president assures that “no matter where the GPW live nowadays, they should know that here, in Russia, we highly revere their steadfastness, courage and loyalty” in the War fronts. The GPW conveys a universalist message, at least to the “Russian world”, or to all combatants of the War sharing its narrative. Next, he thanks the people of Great Britain, France and the US for their “contribution for the Victory”, reminding the audience of “our historical meeting by the Elbe [river]” and its example of “trust and unity”—“our common legacy”, which “lied at the foundation of the post-War order”. “Nonetheless”, the president restrains his optimism, “in the last decades” these principles “became increasingly ignored”. As a result, “we have seen attempts at creating a unipolar world” as its “bloc thinking” gains momentum. By contrast, the leader champions

---

<sup>180</sup> “мы вновь осознаём всю грандиозность Победы над нацизмом. Гордимся, что именно наши отцы и деды смогли одолеть, сокрушить и уничтожить эту тёмную силу. [...] Тогда, в 30-е годы прошлого века, просвещённая Европа не сразу увидела смертоносную угрозу в идеологии нацизма. [...] В неё [войне] было вовлечено почти 80 процентов населения Земли. Порабощены, оккупированы многие государства Европы. [...] Советский Союз принял на себя самые жестокие удары врага. [...] И закономерно, что именно Красная Армия в результате сокрушительного штурма Берлина поставила победную точку в войне с гитлеровской Германией.”



“a system of equal security for all states”, built on a global, “non-bloc basis”. Conforming to his latter denunciation against ideological confrontations (SP 2012), Putin regards the tension with his western counterparts as a reintroduction of the Cold War divide through geopolitical considerations. To some extent, Putin’s perceived encirclement became a self-fulfilling prophecy during his third term.<sup>181</sup>

The leader then proceeds to greet the VD guests mentioning one by one the name of the countries parading along with the Russian troops. In particular, Putin addresses China, which, “like the Soviet Union, lost millions of people in the war [...] in the main front of the fight against militarism in Asia”. He also mentions the deeds of the remaining countries and praises “Our common holiday”—but only China has the privilege to be equated with the USSR. This stands in an indicative contrast with the European-oriented policy during Medvedev’s rule and Putin’s proposal of a Europe “from Lisbon to Vladivostok” (Deutsche Welle 2010).<sup>182</sup>

Next, the president pays homage to the memory to all those who fought until death, mentioning some of the customary GPW war theatres, adding “Dnepr”, the Ukrainian river—it also must be embraced by the common GPW/VD memory. Moreover, he pays tribute to those who “are not anymore with us”—possibly in reference to the gradual vanishing of living veterans—which is followed, for the first time, by a minute of silence in the middle of the presidential pronouncement; its gravity is paced by rhythmic beats.<sup>183</sup>

Finally, the head of state turns to the veterans themselves, the “main heroes of the Victory day”, whose deeds guaranteed peace “to many generations” and is preserved by their descendants. It is interesting

---

<sup>181</sup> “И где бы ни жили сегодня ветераны Великой Отечественной, они должны знать, что здесь, в России, мы высоко чтим их стойкость, мужество и верность фронтовому братству. [...] Благодарны народам Великобритании и Франции, Соединённых Штатов Америки за их вклад в Победу. Помним историческую встречу союзников на Эльбе. То доверие и единство, которые стали нашим общим наследием, примером объединения народов ради мира и стабильности. Именно эти ценности легли в основу послевоенного мирового устройства. Была создана Организация Объединённых Наций, сформирована система современного международного права. Эти институты на деле доказали свою эффективность в разрешении споров и конфликтов. Однако в последние десятилетия всё чаще стали игнорироваться базовые принципы международного сотрудничества. Те принципы, которые были выстраданы человечеством после глобальных испытаний войны. Мы видели попытки создания однополярного мира, видим, как набирает обороты силовое блоковое мышление. Всё это подтачивает устойчивость мирового развития. И нашей общей задачей должна стать выработка системы равной безопасности для всех государств. Системы, адекватной современным угрозам, построенной на региональной и глобальной, внеблоковой основе”

<sup>182</sup> “Мы приветствуем сегодня всех наших зарубежных гостей и выражаем особую признательность представителям стран, которые сражались с нацизмом и японским милитаризмом. Вместе с российскими военными по Красной площади пройдут парадные расчёты ещё десяти государств. Это представители Азербайджана, Армении, Беларуси, Киргизии, Казахстана, Таджикистана. Их деды и прадеды были плечом к плечу – и на фронте, и в тылу. Это посланцы Китая, который, как и Советский Союз, потерял в этой войне многие и многие миллионы людей. И через который проходил главный фронт борьбы с милитаризмом в Азии. Отважно бились с нацистами и воины Индии. Твёрдое, непримиримое сопротивление фашистам оказали сербы. На протяжении всей войны нашу страну активно поддерживала Монголия. И сейчас в едином парадном строю – уже внуки и правнуки военного поколения. День Победы – наш общий праздник.”

<sup>183</sup> “Мы преклоняемся перед всеми, кто насмерть стоял за каждую улицу, каждый дом, каждый рубеж Отчизны. Кто погиб в жестоких боях под Москвой и Сталинградом, на Курской дуге и Днепре. Мы склоняем головы перед светлой памятью [...] Всех, кто не вернулся с войны. Всех, кого уже нет с нами.”

that their space in the utterance is rather limited this year, in comparison to the 2012-14 veneration crescendo.<sup>184</sup>

After the Parade, the promotion of an entirely new event in Moscow's Victory Day celebration took place: the March of the Immortal Regiment. As a public action that started three years before in the city of Tomsk, the March entailed the parading of portraits of War veterans by their family members, in a quite literal interpretation of the presidential remarks that "every family has its veterans" (SP 2010; SR 2000). In the climax of this civic mobilization, Putin himself attended the parade and walked along with the population, in a rare display of closeness to the general public—though he was surrounded by bodyguards.

In the evening, Putin begins his **Speech at the Reception (2015)** by "heartily congratulating" everyone on the day of the Victory and the day of Russia's "glory and strength". As a "milestone that changed the world", time cannot defeat it, nor can it defeat "our memory" and "our common responsibility for the preservation of the heritage of the heroic defenders of the Fatherland". "Our people", he continues, "fought for its motherland, its home, *its culture and its language*". The president seems to be particularly emphatic about the necessity to defend the mnemonic community based on the GPW/VD narrative. This reflects the emerging rhetoric on "bio-politics", as showed in the recent developments in Ukraine (Casula 2014; Makarychev 2015). As a result, "the population as a whole is considered in terms of being a problem" as the Russian state can claim responsibility for this population, regardless of territorial borders (Casula 2014:5). On that account, the leader observes that "the Victory was achieved by unity and genuine brotherhood" of the peoples of the USSR.<sup>185</sup>

When addressing the veterans, Putin mentions the "huge honour" of being with them, "hugging, shaking hands, hearing advices, say the most important words of our love to you". When assessing the veteran's values of dignity and "loyalty to truth and justice", he assures that they "managed to pass it to their children and grandchildren". Consequently, in this intergenerational relationship lies the "power of Russia".<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> "Дорогие наши ветераны! Вы главные герои великого дня Победы. Ваш подвиг predetermined мирную, достойную жизнь для многих поколений. Дал им возможность созидать и смело идти вперёд. И сегодня ваши дети, внуки и правнуки уверенно держат эту победную высоту."

<sup>185</sup> "Сердечно поздравляю вас с днём Великой Победы! С днём славы, силы России! [...] Победа в Великой Отечественной войне – это веха, изменившая мир, событие общечеловеческого [...] Время не может затмить ни нашу память, ни нашу общую ответственность за сохранение героического наследия защитников Отечества. Великая Победа была, есть и будет высоким мерилом наших помыслов и поступков. Наш народ сражался за свои святыни, за Родину, за свой дом, за культуру и родной язык, за нравственные и духовные ценности, за свободу Европы и за мир на планете. Мы всегда будем помнить, что Победа была добыта единением и подлинным братством всех народов СССР – Советского Союза."

<sup>186</sup> "Сейчас мы испытываем одни и те же чувства: радость и волнение, скорбь и гордость и, конечно же, благодарность нашим ветеранам. Для всех нас огромная честь быть в эти дни рядом с вами, обнять, пожать"

In Putin's third term, the narrative takes a distinctively emotional turn. The political implications of the War memory became more subtle, at the same time its symbolism became increasingly embodied in the veterans. Since 2007, the veterans have a section of the SP dedicated specifically to them, and, in 2008 (SR), Medvedev remarkably claimed to "love" them. Nonetheless, it is from Putin's third term that the veteran's symbolism has been passionately elevated. As the guardian of the myth, they are also—paradoxically—its subject; their role is historical, not operating in the present. They will not be "let down" (SP 2014), "something" increasingly urgent and obscure must be done in their behalf—more precisely, "anything" to protect their memory (SP 2013). The president personally shakes hands with the veterans present in the same dais where he stands, as closely followed by the media (As periskop 2012a, 2013c). Amid this *hype*, it is symptomatic that a new phenomenon appeared: the fake veterans—senior citizens parading in forms and exhibiting badges at will. Reportedly, they stood in the dais with the authorities in 2012 (Arsyukhin 2012; periskop 2012b; The Moscow News 2012).

On that account, it is noteworthy that the veteran's significance raise as the archetype of the War and the Victory in a moment when their existence as a demographic group is reaching a critical point. According to some estimates of the Soviet Committee of the War Veterans, from 1985 to 1990, the number of veterans alive reduced from 7.5 million to 5 million (Tumarkin 1994:188). As of 2012, the Ministry of Social Development reckons up to 3.4 million veterans alive (Rosbalt 2012). Notwithstanding, this figure might be tricky, as it has a entails all the citizens entitled to benefits as War survivors of the War, therefore including factory workers, survivors of the blockade of Leningrad and fire fighters, among others. A more realistic figure, considering only those that, strictly speaking, took part in the combats, would be of about 969 thousand in 2005, according to the Russian Ministry of Health (Efremenko 2005). Their role in the VD ritual is rapidly diminishing. Their last parade in formation (1995) was succeeded by a loose march on the Red Square (2000) and finally reached the point that military vehicles carried the veterans in their last participation at the parade (2005). Taking into account that most veterans are over 80 years old, their growing prominence in the myth is not a result of the presidential acclamation, but mainly because they themselves become part of the timeless dimension of the myth, as their lives approach the end. As first-hand accounts of the War disappear, the memory of an historical event gives way to the observance of a mythical one.

---

ваши руки, выслушать советы, сказать самые главные слова о нашей любви к вам, о том, что мы преклоняемся перед вашим мужеством и достоинством, перед вашей верностью правде и справедливости. [...] Эти традиции, эти чувства патриотизма вы сумели передать своим детям и внукам. И в этом родстве поколений – сила России, её национальное достояние и нерушимая нравственная опора.”

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5. 1 Final considerations

In modern Russia, Victory Day is always a superlative event: the “dearest and most popular” holiday (SR 2001); the “sacred holiday of national pride” (SP 2003); “the apex of our glory” (SP 2004); the “most sincere and national holiday in our country” (SP 2005); the “day of great triumph of our people” (SP 2006); the holiday “which has forever become a symbol of our national unity” (SP 2008); Russia’s “brightest, most joyful and most unifying celebration” (SR 2008); the “sacred holiday” (SR 2010); the “holiday of glory and triumph of our people” (SP 2012); “was, is, and will remain our main holiday” (SP 2014). The exaggerated, unrestrained wording used by both presidents when describing the War and the Victory is constantly present in each of the fifteen years analysed. From its inception, Putin and the attending elite saw the importance of cultivating this tradition as a collective practice, and this importance only grew as they established their power. Nevertheless, the importance of the ritual grew among the masses as well, and the social, political and cultural developments of the period reflect the privileged location the Victory ritual has in the country’s symbolic order—in other words, its national identity.

In drawing the conclusions of this research, it is useful to return to the three discursive levels pertaining to the Victory ritual. First, there is the ritual itself; still, it is constituted by two other discursive structures: the political discourse of the Russian leadership (i.e. Putin’s rule) and the country’s national identity (i.e. the symbolic order defining Russia and its society as a country). In my analysis, the Victory ritual is primarily a mediator between these two discursive structures, but it also functions as both their subject and their agent. As *intersubjectively* defined entities, it is nonetheless necessary to address their independent aspects in order to clarify how this mutual constitution takes place.

The widest (or deepest) level of the discourse concerns the Russian national character—its identity. The contextualization since the “Victory Day One” in 1945 indicated that even this level could undergo major changes, as after the collapse of communism. By the beginning of the period of my study, this discursive order was already taking a defined configuration, the “new Russian identity” mentioned in Putin’s first two terms. Although it supported the GPW/VD narrative, its ritual was far from consolidated—it had been re-established five years before, as a result of Russia’s national “revival”, but also of Yeltsin’s political expediency. In this vein, Putin certainly saw in the Victory myth a legitimizing factor for the regime, to the extent that it helped articulate its political agenda with the social demands of the country. The most urgent of these demands, “stability” and national self-esteem (i.e. “Russianness”), were consistently present in the first years of Putin’s presidency; the

practice of remembrance served as a bridge connecting the present and a “glorious” past evoking pride in one’s community. In a similar fashion, the “lessons” and “threats” described in the Speeches suggest an instrumental use of the War narrative in promoting stability, in particular through cohesion and resolute struggle against terrorism.

As the symbolic order was stabilizing, Putin and his group were in more advantageous position in the political struggle than any other group had been since the collapse of the Soviet Union. For the first time after the tumultuous years, a discursive articulation was clearly emerging as dominant in most spheres of social and political life. As argued, its inception was the widespread rejection of the state of affairs in which the country found itself at that moment. On that account, the pursuit of “normalcy” was already present as a nodal point (central signifier) connecting social demands since perestroika, but the discursive practice promoting it in the first place started to erode along with the deterioration of the material conditions of the population.

After a decade of uncertainty, “stability” emerged as the most urgent mechanism to be obtained in order to achieve “normalcy”. The national revival since the end of communism meant that the cultural values under the umbrella of “Russianness” only strengthened its association with “normalcy”. As these two elements secured their position around the main signifier, “great power” was recaptured by the main articulation, to the extent that it once again presented a reference to a “normal” state of affairs for that society.

The most “designed”, so to say, signifier, was that of “conservatism”. It emerged with the set of discursive practices of the group in power to associate antagonistic tendencies in the political field with the “enemies of normalcy”. On that account, a logic of equivalence linked (in chronological order) “terrorism”, “extremism”, “lack of unity” and “disrespect for the memory” as threatening to the “stability” and, therefore, “normalcy”. To protect its culture against these menaces, the Russian society had to rely on Putin’s regime (“conservatism”). This message was incorporated in the VD Speeches from the very beginning of Putin’s presidency; after a relative diminishment with Medvedev, it returned during Putin’s third term.

Finally, “uniqueness” is a reactive signifier, compelled by the “constitutive outsides” of the Russian discourse on normalcy. It became an important element of the discursive practice on normalcy amid the emergence of terrorism on the international agenda. Already a factor threatening the internal order of Russia, Putin envisioned the circumstances for renewed international cooperation, and asserted so in the VD Speeches during his first two terms. Nonetheless, a series of events outside Russia threatened the country’s political elite, who successfully promoted a national sense of “uniqueness” as a complement to the articulation around normalcy. As such, the Russian identity has the unique

feature of being a continuation of the Soviet identity. “Sovietness” was not a major signifier of that discursive order, but rather an ambiguous element subordinated to “uniqueness”. I call it ambiguous because the gradual but steady liquidation of Soviet symbolism at a state level coexists with a lukewarm nostalgia by several sectors of the society. Nonetheless, the Soviet system serves as evidence of Russia’s “uniqueness”, which in turn filter cosmopolitan inspirations in its society—“democracy” becomes “sovereign democracy” and “freedom” is subjected to national values of “collectiveness” and “religiosity”. This explains public support for the authoritarian order of Putin’s Russia and the dismissal of the democratic deficit as unimportant by a considerable part of the Russian society. Furthermore, it frames aggressive external policies as a defensive mechanism for the “stability” of the internal order. This situation puzzles, and sometimes is denied by, external observers. Nonetheless, the events of 2014-2015 serve to confirm this fact, as the country’s reaction to them mostly follows the discursive practices identified in this research.

The War and Victory discourse plays an undeniable role in this articulation by mediating the elite’s intentions with the social attitude of the country. In the first years of Putin’s presidency, it cannot be considered a myth, but rather a tool for (quite openly) advancing the political agenda. As such, the VD was an important tool for promoting desired values in the Russian society, such as “Russianness” and “stability”. As the official narrative promoted during the VD becomes established, the relative importance of advocating concrete measures to tackle specific events diminishes. Its content becomes more self-sufficient and self-referential, which gradually renders it a *depoliticised*, authoritative narrative. My analysis locates this turn in the second half of the 2000s, when the Speeches reduce the references to external events and VD become an event for its own sake. As the national “understanding” of the date “grows deeper” (SP 2006, 2011), it becomes an integral part of national self-understanding. The emphasis on geopolitics is replaced by the “common” memory and the duty it implies as the primary lesson of the Victory. On that account, the national “unity” is derived by from the fact that “every family has its War heroes” and their values are re-experienced in the present through a “holy connection” between generations. As a general trend, some tropes that started as ambitious statements are constantly reinforced, to the point of not provoking attention anymore. As in the crescendo that opens this conclusion, they become unmarked signs, the background information accepted without the need for much consideration. On the surface, this repetition ad nauseam creates in the Speeches a set of platitudes that connect to their underlying message. This is particularly evident for someone examining the Speeches in sequence. As a discursive practice, however, these recurring elements are diffused throughout more than a decade; as such, they potentially become not only unmarked, but also axiomatic. Leaving the context aside, this trend somehow revisits the infamous quotation often misattributed to the Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels: “If you tell a lie

big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.”<sup>187</sup>

The inception of this “apolitical turn” is located somewhere during Putin’s second term; after Medvedev comes to power, it acquires certain regularity as the Speeches shift from addressing concrete topics to more emphatically justifying the date itself. Not without a certain irony, that is probably one of the reasons Medvedev’s reformist agenda did not inspire the society. Neither “modernization” nor “liberalization” were associated with the several “exploits” of the War generation. The notable exception came too late, during his last year in office: SP 2011 mentions the post-War achievements in economy, sciences and a comprehensive lifting of the nation “from the ruins”. The “reset” of international relations, by contrast, was incorporated into the VD ritual during 2010’s common Parade with Russia’s WWII allies. Since this détente was not particularly successful, it evinces the limitations of the ritual in simply “managing” the country’s political order. Moreover, even if it had engendered advances in this sphere, these were abandoned amid the renewed opposition against the country’s leadership and the uneasiness it provoked in it.

What could be considered wishful thinking ten years before by Putin’s third term was a hard fact in the public imaginary. For the most part of society, the VD ritual paid tribute to the most important event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, if not of the entire Russian (and perhaps even world) history. In addition, it accepts its established version as final and therefore not open to questioning—both domestically and abroad. Finally, it regards an uncompromising stance on behalf of Russia’s interests as evidence that the memory of the War and the veterans is being duly honoured.

In a Barthesian sense, we can call the procedure of becoming a myth one of “mystification”. On that account, it not only loses its political meaning, but is also characterised by a “loss of the historical quality” (Barthes 1972:115). As an event with a dual nature, it takes place inside and outside time and space dimensions (Lévi-Strauss 1963). While its temporal dimension endows its existence with factuality, as something that truly happened, its atemporal aspects grants its source of authority and inspiration at any point in time and space. As such, it conveys “paradigmatic” truth (Lincoln 1989:24). At the same time, it cannot be considered manipulation in any sense, as the process of becoming a myth does not mean that its message become hidden, but rather that it becomes “naturalised” (Barthes 1972:130). This help in understanding why attempts at revising the historical event or its sensitive aspects, such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, are treated as threatening to the national symbolic order (i.e. identity) at large. The GPW/VD myth has risen to the pinnacle of the Russian national identity through the processes mentioned. As its fundamental narrative, it embodies the meaning of

---

<sup>187</sup> It actually comes from Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*: “the most brilliant propagandist technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principle is borne in mind constantly and with unflagging attention.”

being “Russian”, a citizen of a “stable”, “great power”, which acts on behalf of the status quo by preserving (“conserving”) peace and the (natural) order of things. This self-identity is “unique”, but, most importantly, it is “normal”. In fact, the epic narrative of a terrible War that becomes a glorious Victory could also be dubbed the “road to Normalcy”. On that account, Wertsch provides the useful concept of “schematic narrative template” (Wertsch 2008b:65-66), which is an abstraction that shapes new historical information according to its basic premises. In the GPW/VD case, that would be the “expulsion of foreign enemies” narrative, where an initial state of harmony is disrupted by an invader, which is eventually defeated and the harmony is restored—at a higher level due to the glory that the Victory entails.

In the GPW version of the “road to normalcy”, an initially functioning (“normal”) Soviet Union is attacked by a vicious enemy, thus disrupting the original equilibrium. Nevertheless, this period of troubles is overcome after four years of steadfast effort, unfaltering valour and unwavering faith. In the end, the promising outcome comes as the only one possible. In modern Russia, this narrative acts as a perfect allegory for an unfinished story: the ongoing, “long” transition that the country has been undergoing since the collapse of the Soviet Union. With the historical event as precedent, this process is bound to result in a triumphant achievement of “normalcy”, if only the same qualities are demonstrated in the face of the present challenges. Devoid of its particularities of space and time, the narrative still preserves its mythical nature as a teleological—or even eschatological—account of any transitional period in that society.

## 5.2 Research limitations and further studies

Given the theoretical and methodological assumptions, as well as their practical undertaking, this thesis certainly has its share of limitations, which leaves a blank space to be filled by forthcoming researches. For me, some of them became clear as I was writing the work, while other—I am convinced—were left unnoticed and might never be dealt with. Here is a brief list of those I observed, and which might help the reader in locating this research within the academic debate of this topic.

First, my choice of material prevented most insights beyond the official, state-sponsored accounts of the myth. Whereas the GPW/VD narrative clearly plays an important function in the Russian identity, this could be more clearly defined if analysed a much wider range of sources, both from authorities and from the general population. Any research with this orientation is highly likely to reveal the “blank spots” (Wertsch 2008b) ignored by official narratives, which in turn may provide interesting insights on the space the myth has within the “subconscious” of society (Gudkov 2005) and its daily, mundane practices.



In regards to my research method, I used its conceptualization on a selective basis. While I believe that the “struggle for hegemony” in the discursive field is a powerful tool in analysing political processes, I discarded Laclau’s definition of “myth”. This is an important observation, as in Laclau’s (1990:60-65) theoretical perspective a myth is a provisory demand arising from a dislocation, becoming a “social imaginary” when this demand is met. Strictly speaking, in this terminology, the definition of myth used in my research is what Laclau and the Essex school of discourse analysis consider a “social imaginary”. In the same vein, the concept of “hegemony” is not approached directly in this work, as it dealt with three discursive levels that are complementary, not antagonistic, to each other.

In addition, I purposefully avoided the “personification” of the political processes. Both Modern Russia and its GPW narrative feature “strong leaders”—respectively, Putin and Stalin. Whereas these personalities play an important function in their respective discursive articulations, I considered this to be outside my research proposal. Not by accident, I also avoided the term “West” as much as possible, as I consider it an extremely problematic concept. In my point of view, the politico-economical divide between central and peripheral countries (developed/underdeveloped, first and third world) is much more useful for understanding international relations. As a culture/civilization, the “West” is an oversimplification of a rich variety of perspectives, including its hybrid borderlands (such as that of Russia and Latin America). As a system of values, it presents two fundamental contradictions. First, it has its own myth, that of the Enlightenment, which is sometimes portrayed as the origin of humanism and rationalism at the same time that its negative offspring (e.g. colonialism, imperialism) is overlooked. Not only that, it also argues for universalism, at the same time that it is defended as a heritage of the “Western” civilization only, in what can only be considered ethnocentrism. On that account, I refrained from moral judgements on the merits of Russia’s “sovereign democracy” or on the interpretations of freedom as a collective (instead of individual) right. From my experience, when studying Russia’s relation with the European countries or North America, the reification of the “West” is usually present in belligerent rhetoric, both among the in-group and the out-group—for that reason, the concept appears in this work mainly during Putin’s third term, when a form of “anti-Westernism” in fact started to gain momentum at an official level. Nonetheless, beyond the West/non-West divide lies an interesting topic of research, mostly unexplored in this work: the relation between the Soviet/Russian WWII narrative and that of its neighbours. I believe it is possible to reach a comprehensive account of the conflict, which would embrace all versions in their ambiguity, and therefore helping to overcome the negative implications that the current “dialogue of the deaf” has in the European continent—as the Ukrainian crisis dramatically shows (see Judt 2000 for the impact of diverging WWII narratives in Europe). Indeed,

the developments in Ukraine and its relation to contesting war narratives deserves a thesis of its own, and unfortunately could not be properly addressed within the scope of this project.

Finally, this thesis leaves open the possibility of further exploring what I consider to be two promising research topics from the perspective of discourse analysis: that of normalcy and that of the GPW veterans. As suggested by my conclusions, it is noteworthy that the drive towards the “normal” is widespread in Russia’s political, social and cultural spheres. This objective is present in any context, at the same time that it does not have a specific substance of its own. Even in the Russian language, the term “normal” (*normal’no*) is abundantly used to denote anything that is not particularly bad/wrong, at the same time that it does not offer a “positive” reference in return. In the perspective of the Essex school, normalcy is an “empty signifier” in Russia’s discourse, present everywhere due to its perceived lack, at the same time revealing the “impossibility of its adequate representation” (Laclau 2005:39). As such, it can be fruitfully employed in analysing other contexts of the country’s social dimensions. Concerning the War veterans, the heightened attention the group has received in the official War accounts during the last years come as an intriguing phenomenon in the evolution of the VD ritual. It is noteworthy that this occurs at a moment when the group as such is disappearing, and probably will cease to exist within the next decade. As such, their mythical status will become even more central to the narrative. On the other hand, their physical absence will facilitate its political use as a powerful element in the social imaginary. In conclusion, the most expressive developments of the War narrative will certainly be related to the veterans, as was the case of the “March of the Immortal Regiment” in 2015, and therefore should be monitored in future researches on the Victory Day ritual and its narrative.

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

#### Presidential 9 May speeches

- Medvedev, D. A. (2008). *Vystupleniya na parade, posvyashchennom godovshchine Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne* [Speeches at the parade marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War]. Retrieved July 2015 at: <http://archive.kremlin.ru>
- Medvedev, D. A. (2008). *Vystupleniya na priyome v chest' godovshchiny Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne* [Speeches at the reception marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War]. Retrieved July 2015 at: <http://archive.kremlin.ru>
- Medvedev, D. A. (2009-2011). *Vystupleniya na parade, posvyashchennom godovshchine Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne* [Speeches at the parade marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War]. Retrieved July 2015 at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/>
- Medvedev, D. A. (2009-2011). *Vystupleniya na priyome v chest' godovshchiny Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne* [Speeches at the reception marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War]. Retrieved July 2015 at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/>
- Putin, V. V. (2000-2008). *Vystupleniya na parade, posvyashchennom godovshchine Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne* [Speeches at the parade marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War]. Retrieved July 2015 at: <http://archive.kremlin.ru>
- Putin, V. V. (2000-2008). *Vystupleniya na priyome v chest' godovshchiny Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne* [Speeches at the reception marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War]. Retrieved July 2015 at: <http://archive.kremlin.ru>
- Putin, V. V. (2012-2015). *Vystupleniya na parade, posvyashchennom godovshchine Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne* [Speeches at the parade marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War]. Retrieved July 2015 at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/>
- Putin, V. V. (2012-2015). *Vystupleniya na priyome v chest' godovshchiny Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne* [Speeches at the reception marking the anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War]. Retrieved July 2015 at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/>

#### Other presidential pronouncements

- Medvedev, D. A. (2008) *Ezhegodnoye Poslaniye Federal'nomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation]. 2008. Web. Retrieved 15 Aug 2014. <http://archive.kremlin.ru/>
- Putin, V. V. (2005) *Ezhegodnoye Poslaniye Federal'nomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation] Retrieved 10 Jan 2015. <http://archive.kremlin.ru/>
- Putin, V. V. (2000). *Ezhegodnoye Poslaniye Federal'nomu Sobraniyu Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation]. Retrieved 10 Jan 2014. <http://archive.kremlin.ru/>

#### Video recordings

- Kassa Bravo Kassa Bravo Kassa Bravo [Kacca Bravo Kassa Bravo Kacca Bravo] (2011, 11 May). *Voyennyi Parad v Den' Pobedy 66, 9 maya 2011 VDay Parade* [Military Parade on Victory Day 66, 9 May 2011 Vday Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved on 20 April 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1y7lj0nHS5c>
- RT na russkom [RT na russkom] (2012, 9 May). *Parad Pobedy na Krasnoy ploschadi 9 maya 2012 (polnoe video)* [Victory Parade at the Red square 9 May 2012 (full video)]. Youtube.

- Retrieved on 22 April 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryNzmstsakg>
- RT na rusском [RT na rusском] (2013, 9 May). *Parad Pobedy v Moskve* [Victory Parade in Moscow]. Youtube. Retrieved on 22 April 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oz3f0OZT-8g>
- RT na rusском [RT na rusском] (2014, 9 May). *Parad Pobedy 9 maya 2014* [Victory Parade 9 May 2012]. Youtube. Retrieved on 22 April 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vu0oEFKkiV8>
- Rossiya 24 [Россия 24] (2015, 9 May). *Parad Pobedy na Krasnoy Ploshchadi 9 maya 2015*. [Victory Parade at the Red square 9 May 2015]. Youtube. Retrieved on 10 May 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GE023IHaCyE>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011a, 12 April). *9 Maya 2004g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2004. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 15 Oct. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8r4k4SIIEg>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011b, 12 April). *9 Maya 2005g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2005. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 15 Oct. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPuQC47FrZE>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011c, 14 April) *9 Maya 2001g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2001. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 12 Oct. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcLMKzFHeIM>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011d, 14 April). *9 Maya 2002g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2002. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 12 Oct. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehZKLIRGCQ4&feature=related>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011e, 14 April). *9 Maya 2003g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2003. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 13 Oct. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoFLXDKoIYs>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011f, 15 April). *9 Maya 2000g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2000. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 10 Oct. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0vgIoBXrks&list=PLD455520C775BE218>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011g, 17 April). *9 Maya 1995g. Moskva. Poklonnaya Gora. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2006. Moscow. Poklonnaya Hill. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 06 Feb. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CPJwtuk1iIc>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011h, 18 April). *9 Maya 2006g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2006. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 15 Oct. 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5b1rGE2s9c>
- Stanislav Derkachev [Станислав Деркачев] (2011i, 19 April). *9 Maya 2007g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2007. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 13 Apr. 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCwknM0FtWk>
- Viacheslav Tciplenkov (2015a, 15 February). *9 Maya 2008g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2007. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 13 Apr. 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-acxlnfjKs>
- Viacheslav Tciplenkov (2015b, 15 February). *9 Maya 2009g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad* [May 9, 2009. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade]. Youtube. Retrieved 15 Apr. 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unKZpNohvog>

Viacheslav Tciplenkov (2015c, 15 February). *9 Maya 2010g. Moskva. Krasnaya Ploshchad'. Voyenny Parad. Salyut.* [May 9, 2010. Moscow. Red Square. Military Parade. Fireworks]. Youtube. Retrieved 15 Apr. 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SL3zeaKQsN4>

## Secondary sources

### Books and journal articles

- Althusser, L. (1972). *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review.
- Ashplant, T. G., Dawson, G., & Roper, M. (2000). The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration: Context, Structures and Dynamics. In T. G. Ashplant, G. Dawson, & M. R. (Eds.), *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (p. 3-86). London: Routledge.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bell, D. (2006). *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Politics between Past and Present*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, J., Laclau, E. & Žižek, S. (2000). *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*. London: Verso.
- Carr, E. H. (1987). *What is Hustiry*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Charap, S. (2007). Inside out: domestic political change and foreign policy in Vladimir Putin's first term. *Demokratizatsiya*, 15(3), 335-352.
- Casula, P. (2000). Political and National Identity in Russia, Developments in Russian Political thought in the 1990s. In P. Casula & J. Perovic (Eds.), *Identities and Politics during the Putin Presidency* (p. 32-38). Stuttgart: Stuttgart-Verlag.
- Chandler, A. (2007). *Semiotics: the Basics*. New York: Routledge.
- Doroņenkova, Kristīne. (2011). Official Russian Perspectives on the Historical Legacy: A Brief Introduction. In N. Muižnieks (Ed.), *The Geopolitics of History in Latvian-Russian Relations* (p. 21-20). Rīga: Academic Press of the University of Latvia
- Eco, U. (1976). *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Forest, B. & Johnson, J. (2002). Unraveling the Threads of History: Soviet-Era Monuments and Post-Soviet National Identity in Moscow. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 92(3), 524-547.
- Gill, G. J. (2011). *Symbols and legitimacy in Soviet politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halbwachs, M. (2011). *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1972). The Social Function of the Past: Some Questions. *Past and Present* 55(1), 3-17.
- Howarth, D. R. (2000). *Discourse*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Howarth, D. R. (2005). Applying Discourse Theory: the Method of Articulation. In D. R. Howarth & J. Torfing (Eds.), *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Howarth, D. R. (2009). Populism in Context. In P. Casula & J. Perovic (Eds.), *Identities and Politics during the Putin Presidency*. Stuttgart: Stuttgart-Verlag, 32-38.
- Howarth, D. R. & Stavrakakis, Y. (2000). Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis. In A. Norval & Y. Stavrakakis (Eds.), *Discourse theory and political analysis: identities, hegemonies and social change* (p. 1-23). New York: Manchester University Press.

- Howarth, D. R. & Torfing, J. (2005). *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Judt, T. (2000). The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe". In I. Deák, J. T. Gross & Tony Judt (Eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (p. 293-323). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Klymenko, L. (2015). World War II or Great Patriotic War remembrance? Crafting the nation in commemorative speeches of Ukrainian presidents. *National Identities*, DOI: 10.1080/14608944.2014.990956.
- Koselleck, R. (2004). *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (T. Keith, Trans.). New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press.
- Kudryashov, S. (2010). Remembering and Researching the War: The Soviet and Russian Experience. In J. Echterkamp & S. Martens (Eds.), *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe* (p. 86-115). New York: Berghahn.
- Kurilla, I. (2009a). The Symbolic Politics of the Putin Administration. In P. Casula & J. Perovic (Eds.), *Identities and Politics during the Putin Presidency* (p. 255-269). Stuttgart: Stuttgart-Verlag.
- Laclau, E. (1990). *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. (1994). *The Making of Political Identities*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. (2005). Why do empty signifiers matter to politics? In E. Laclau (Ed.). *Emancipation(s)* (p. 36-46). London: Verso.
- Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. London: Verso.
- Le Goff, J. (2003). *História e Memória* [History and memory] (B. Leitão, I. Ferreira & S. Ferreira Borges, Trans.) Campinas: Editora Da Unicamp.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1963). *Structural Anthropology*. (C. Jacobson & B. G. Schoepf, Trans.). New York: Basic, 206-31.
- Lincoln, B. (1989). *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*. New York: Oxford University Publishing.
- Ločmele, K., Procevska O. & Zelče, V. (2011). Commemorative Dates and Related Rituals: Soviet Experience, Its Transformation and Contemporary Victory Day Celebrations in Russia and Latvia. In N. Muižnieks (Ed.), *The Geopolitics of History in Latvian-Russian Relations* (p. 109-138). Rīga: Academic Press of the University of Latvia.
- Lotman, Y. (1990). *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (A. Shukman, Trans.). London & New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Lyotard, J. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press.
- Mälksoo, M. (2009). The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe. *European Journal of International Relations* 15(4), 653–680.
- Mälksoo, M. (2015). Memory must be defended': Beyond the politics of mnemonical security. *Security Dialogue* 1(17).
- Marx, K. (1852). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonapart*. page. Retrieved on 10 May 2013 from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>
- Megill, A. (2007). *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice*.

Chicago: University of Chicago.

- Morozov, V. (2013). "Subaltern Empire?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 60(6), 16-28
- MOROZOV, V. (2009). *Rossiia i Drugiye: identichnost' i granitsy politicheskogo soobshchestva* [Russia and the Others: Identity and Boundaries of a Political Community]. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Mustajoki, A. & Protassova, E. (2012). Russification of Western concepts: Political Will and Crisis in a Russian Way. In R. Alapuro, A. S. Mustajoki & P. Pesonen (Eds.), *Understanding Russianness* (p. 32-52). London: Routledge.
- Natoli, K. (2010). Weaponizing Nationality: an Analysis of Russia's Passport Policy in Georgia. *Boston University International Law Journal*, 28(389), p. 389-417.
- Neumann, I. (2008). Discourse Analysis. In P. Klotz (Ed.), *Qualitative Methods in International Relations a Pluralist Guide*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Norval, A. & Mijnsen, I. (2009). Dislocation in Context. In P. Casula and J. Perovic. *Identities and Politics during the Putin Presidency* (p. 39-47). Stuttgart: Stuttgart-Verlag.
- Nyysönen, H. (2008). Contested Traditions? The Usage of Three National Holidays in Contemporary Hungary. In A. Wöll & H. Wydra, *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe* (p. 169-185). London: Routledge, 2008.
- Nyysönen, H. (2009). Politics of Calendar. Independence Day in the Republic of Finland. In D, McCrone & G. McPherson (Eds.), *National Days: Constructing and Mobilizing National Identity* (p. 136-150). London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Olick, J. K. & Robbins, J. (1998). Social Memory Studies: from "collective memory" to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices. *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, 105–140.
- Onken, E. (2007). The Baltic States and Moscow's 9 May Commemoration: Analysing Memory Politics in Europe. *Europe-Asia Studies* 59(1), 23-46
- Pêcheux, M. (1982). *Language, Semantics and Ideology*. London: Macmillan.
- Perovic, J. & Casula, P. (2009a). *Identities and Politics during the Putin Presidency*. Stuttgart: Stuttgart-Verlag.
- Perovic, J. & Casula, P. (2009b) The Stabilization of Russia under Putin's Presidency: Critical Reflections. In J. Perovic & P. Casula (Eds.), *Identities and Politics during the Putin Presidency* (p. 38-38). Stuttgart: Stuttgart-Verlag.
- Posner, R. (2011). Post-modernism, Post-structuralism, Post-semiotics? Sign Theory at the Fin De Siècle. *Semiotica* 183(1/4), 9-30.
- Prozorov, S. (2005). Russian conservatism in the Putin presidency: The dispersion of a hegemonic discourse. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 10(2), 121-143.
- Prozorov, S. (2008). The paradox of infra-liberalism: towards a genealogy of 'managed democracy' in Putin's Russia. In A. Wöll, & H. Wydra, *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe* (pp. 186-202). New York: Routledge.
- Ryazanova-Clarke, L. (2008). Re-creation of the Nation: Orthodox and Heterodox Discourses in Post-Soviet Russia. *Scando-Slavica* 54, 223-239.
- Ryazanova-Clarke, L. (2012). The 'West' in the Linguistic Construction of Russianness in Contemporary Public Discourse. In R. Alapuro, A. S. Mustajoki & P. Pesonen (Eds.) *Understanding Russianness* (p. 3-18). London: Routledge.
- Rouhier-Willoughby, J. (2003). Victory Day Celebration: Memory and Validation. *Folklorica* 8(22),

24-34.

- Sakwa, R. (2008). Myth and Democratic Identity in Russia. In A. Wöll & H. Wydra, *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe* (p. 204-218). London: Routledge.
- Sakwa, R. (2008). Myth and democratic identity in Russia. In A. Wöll, & H. Wydra: *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe* (pp. 203-218). New York: Routledge.
- Sakwa, R. (2010). Political Leadership. In S. Wegren & H. Dale (Eds.), *After Putin's Russia: Past Perfect, Future Uncertain* (p. 17-38). Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Shmelev, A. (2012). A Russian view of western concepts. In R. Alapuro, A. S. Mustajoki & P. Pesonen (Eds.) *Understanding Russianness* (p. 53-65). London: Routledge.
- Torring, J. (2005). Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments and Challenges. In D. R. Howarth & J. Torring, *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance* (p. 1-32). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Toshchenko, Z. T. (2010). Historical Consciousness and Historical Memory. *Russian Studies in History* 49(1), 37-52.
- Townshend, J. (2004). Laclau and Mouffe's Hegemonic Project: The Story so Far. *Political Studies* 52, 269-288.
- Tumarkin, N. (1994). *The Living & the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2008a). Collective Memory and Narrative Templates. *Social research* 75(1), 133-156.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2008b). Blank Spots in Collective Memory: A Case Study of Russia. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617(58), 58-71.
- Wertsch, J. V. (2009). Collective Remembering. *Semiotica* 173(1/4), 233-247.
- Wood, E. (2011). Performing Memory, Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of WWII in Russia. *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38, 172-200.
- Wöll, Alexander & Harald Wydra (2008). *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Wydra, H. (2007). *Communism and the Emergence of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wydra, H. (2008). The Power of Second Reality: Communist Myths and Representations of Democracy. In A. Wöll & H. Wydra. *Democracy and Myth in Russia and Eastern Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Žižek, S. (1993). *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press.

## Electronic Sources

### *Academic articles and policy papers*

- Casula, P. (2014, May 2). The Road to Crimea: Putin's Foreign Policy between Reason of State, Sovereignty and Bio-Politics. *Russian Analytical Digest No 148: Foreign Policy and Ideology*. Retrieved 10 July 2015. [http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/180330/ipublicationdocument\\_singledocument/f7178c0c-1fdf-4096-8967-f240ed3dd245/en/Russian\\_Analytical\\_Digest\\_148.pdf](http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/180330/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/f7178c0c-1fdf-4096-8967-f240ed3dd245/en/Russian_Analytical_Digest_148.pdf)
- Gudkov, Lev. (2005). The Fetters of Victory: How the War Provides Russia with Its Identity (M.



- Gabowitsch, Trans.). *Eurozine*. Retrieved 20 May 2015. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-05-03-gudkov-en.html>.
- Gudkov, Lev. (2007). Russia's systemic crisis Negative mobilization and collective cynicism (A. Güttel, Trans.). *Eurozine*. Retrieved 18 April 2015. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-09-13-gudkov-en.html>.
- Gudkov, Lev. (2014). Russian public opinion and Vladimir Putin's 'Ukrainian policy' (I. Maryniak, Trans.). *Eurozine*. Retrieved 18 April 2015. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-10-01-gudkov-en.html>.
- Hopf, T. (2009, Sep.) Russia's Place in the World: An Exit Option?. *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 79*. Retrieved 20 May 2015. [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm\\_079.pdf](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_079.pdf)
- Siebert, J. (2014, May). The Return of Ideology—Russia's New Sense of Mission <sup>1</sup> *Russian Analytical Digest No 148: Foreign Policy and Ideology*. Retrieved 10 July 2015. [http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/180330/ipublicationdocument\\_singledocument/f7178c0c-1fdf-4096-8967-f240ed3dd245/en/Russian\\_Analytical\\_Digest\\_148.pdf](http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/180330/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/f7178c0c-1fdf-4096-8967-f240ed3dd245/en/Russian_Analytical_Digest_148.pdf)
- Kurilla, I. (2009b, Sep.). Memory Wars in the Post-Soviet Space. *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 63*. Retrieved 06 June 2015. [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm\\_063.pdf](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_063.pdf)
- Kurilla, I. (2010 Apr.). Rethinking the Revolutionary Past: How Color Revolutions Have Led to New Interpretations of Russian History. *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 99*. Web. Retrieved 09 June 2015. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/rethinking-revolutionary-past-how-color-revolutions-have-led-new-interpretations-russian>.
- Kurilla, I. (2012, June) In Search Of National Unity or International Separation: WWII Era Textbook Narratives in Post-Soviet States. *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 203*. Retrieved 16 June 2015. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm203.pdf>
- Kurilla, I. (2014, Aug.). The Implications of Russia's Law against the "Rehabilitation of Nazism. *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 331*. Retrieved 10 June 2015. [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/201408\\_Kurilla](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/201408_Kurilla)
- Laruelle, M. (2012, Sep.). 'Natsdem': The New Wave Of Anti-Putin Nationalists. *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 223*. Retrieved 18 May 2015. [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm\\_223\\_Laruelle\\_Sept2012.pdf](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_223_Laruelle_Sept2012.pdf)
- Makarychev, A. (2010, Dec.). Great Patriotic War Narratives in the Russian Cinema: Collective Self, Internal Others, and Dislocations of Identity. *Russian Analytical Digest No 89: Film, Identity and the Marshrutka*. Retrieved 12 April 2015. [http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/125713/ipublicationdocument\\_singledocument/2be46e58-d5bc-4a2b-bc14-977fceb6c59/en/Russian\\_Analytical\\_Digest\\_89.pdf](http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/125713/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/2be46e58-d5bc-4a2b-bc14-977fceb6c59/en/Russian_Analytical_Digest_89.pdf)
- Makarychev, A. (2015, July). Reassembling Lands or Reconnecting People? Geopolitics and Biopower in Russia's Neighborhood Policy. *PONARS EURASIA Policy Memo No. 367*. Retrieved 20 July 2015. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/reassembling-lands-or-reconnecting-people>
- Morozov, V. (2010, Oct.). Modernizing Sovereign Democracy? Russian Political Thinking and the Future Of The 'Reset'. *PONARS EURASIA. Eurasia Policy Memo No. 130*. Retrieved 25 May 2015. [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm\\_130.pdf](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_130.pdf)
- Morozov, V. (2012, June). Of Jackals and Hamsters: Dividing Lines in Russian Politics and the

Prospects for Democratization. *PONARS EURASIA. Eurasia Policy Memo No. 193*. Retrieved 28 May 2015. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm193.pdf>

Surkov, V. Y. (2005). *Suverenitet – Eto politicheskiy sinonim konkurentosposobnosti* [Sovereignty is the Political Synonym of Competitiveness]. Retrieved 10 January 2015. <http://sd.csu.ru/node/65>

Zhurzhenko, T. (2007). The Geopolitics of Memory. *Eurozine*. Retrieved 10 April 2015. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-05-10-zhurzhenko-en.html>.

Zhurzhenko, T. (2012). Heroes into Victims. *Eurozine*. Retrieved 15 December 2014. <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2012-10-31-zhurzhenko-en.html>.

#### Newspaper articles

5 Kanal. (2014, May 5). *Ukrayina Vidmovlyayet'sya Vid 'Heorhiyevs'koyi Strichky' Na Koryst' 'Chervonoho Maku' "* [Ukraine refuses "Saint George's Ribbon" on behalf of the "Red Poppy"] . Retrieved 20 April, 2015. <http://www.5.ua/kultura/ukraina-vidmovliaietsia-vid-heorhiievskoi-strichky-na-koryst-chervonoho-maku-49550.html>

Arsyukhin, Y. (2012, May 14). *U Mavzoleya zasekli Falshivogo Veterana* [A Fake Veteran was Found by the Mausoleum]. Retrieved 10 April 2015. <http://www.kp.ru/daily/25881.5/2844529/>

Deutsche Welle. (2010, November 25). *Putin calls for closer economic cooperation with the EU*. Retrieved 10 April, 2015. <http://dw.com/p/QHkZ>

Efremenko, T. (2005, May 6). *Veteran Imeet Pravo* [The Veteran has the Right]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. 06 May 2005. Web. Retrieved 10 June 2015. <http://www.rg.ru/2005/05/06/veteran.html>

Illarionov, A. (2014, November 10). *Annexation of Crimea is a Litmus Test for Russian Opposition*. Retrieved 10 April, 2105. <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/annexation-crimea-iitmus-test-russian-opposition>

Medvedev, Dmitry. (2009, Sept. 10). *Dmitry Medvedev: Rossiya, Vpered!* [Russia, ahead!]. Retrieved 10, November 2014 from [gazeta.ru](http://www.kp.ru/daily/25881.5/2844529/): <http://www.kp.ru/daily/25881.5/2844529/>

Medvedev, Dmitry. (2011, May 09). *Dmitry Medvedev: v sovremennom mire eshche ostaetsya ugroza vozniknoveniya konfliktov* [Dmitry Medvedev: the threat of conflicts is still present in the contemporary world]. Retrieved 12, November 2014 from [российская газета](http://www.rg.ru/2011/05/09/ugroza-anons.html): <http://www.rg.ru/2011/05/09/ugroza-anons.html>

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (2015, June 10). *Vladimir Putin Approval Ratings*. Retrieved 10 June 2015 <http://www.rferl.org/content/infographics/infographics/25409123.html>

The Moscow News. (2012, May 14). *Bloggers hunt out fake war veterans*. Retrieved from The Moscow News: <http://themoscownews.com/local/20120514/189725186.html>

#### Video recordings

Channel One [Первый Канал] (2012, 09 May). *Istoriya Voyennykh Paradov 1941-2012 Godov* [History of the Military Parades Between 1941-2012]. Retrieved on 20 Set. 2014. [http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects\\_utro\\_video/si33/p46692](http://www.1tv.ru/sprojects_utro_video/si33/p46692)

Ivan Ivanov [Иван Иванов] (2011, 3 Sept.). *Gennadiy Zyuganov: Iisus Khristos - pervyy kommunist*. Youtube. Retrieved on 15 April. 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unJ7oMgGh3I>

Vice News (2014a, 31 July). *Missing Civilian Bodies found in Mass Graves: Russian Roulette*

(*Dispatch 63*). Youtube. Retrieved on 10 Jan. 2015.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBsEkF\\_GY0E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBsEkF_GY0E)

Vice News (2014b, 31 July). *The New Rebel Offensive: Russian Roulette (Dispatch 63)*. Youtube. Retrieved on 10 Jan. 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBsEkF\\_GY0E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBsEkF_GY0E)

### *Social media*

periskop (2015, 10 May). Parad na Krasnoy ploshchadi-2010: zametki na polyakh [Parade at the Red square-2010: marginal notes]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/610977.html>

periskop (2011, 09 May). Vesenniy voyazh-2011. CH.13 - Maskirovka Mavzoleya [Spring Voyage - 2011 P.13 – Mausoleum's Masking]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/745642.html>

periskop (2012a, May 9). Parad na Krasnoy ploshchadi-2012. zametki na polyakh [Parade at the Red square-2012. marginal notes]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/885320.html>

periskop (2012b, May 9). Feykovyzatsiya nagrad vysokogo ranga [Faking high rank badges]. *LiveJournal*, 9 May 2012b. Web. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/887576.html>

periskop (2013a, Feb. 12). Postsovetskiye parady. CH.1 - yel'tsinskiye parady (1995-1999) [The post-Soviet parades. Part 1 - parades Yeltsin (1995-1999)]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/1006536.html>

periskop (2013b, Feb. 13). Postsovetskiye parady. CH.2 – rannie putinskie parady (2000-2003) [The post-Soviet parades. Part 1 – early putin parades (2000-2003)]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015. <http://periskop.livejournal.com/1006809.html>

periskop (2013c, Feb. 24). Postsovetskiye parady. CH.3 – demazoleizatsiya light (2004-2006) [The post-Soviet parades. Part 3 – demausoleumsation light (2004-2006)]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015. <<http://periskop.livejournal.com/1012778.html>>.

periskop (2013d, 09 May). Parad na Krasnoy ploshchadi-2013: zametki na polyakh [Parade at the Red square-2013: marginal notes]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/1041793.html>

periskop (2013e, 09 May). Parad Pobedy-2013: dopolneniya i ofitalnyye foto [Victory Parade 2013: additions and official pictures]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/1232609.html>

periskop (2014, 09 May). Parad na Krasnoy ploshchadi-2014: zametki na polyakh [Parade at the Red square-2014: marginal notes]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/1232609.html>

periskop (2015d, 09 May). Parad na Krasnoy ploshchadi-2015: zametki na polyakh [Parade at the Red square-2015: marginal notes]. *LiveJournal*. Retrieved 10 May 2015.  
<http://periskop.livejournal.com/1404198.html>.

yuri-ost (username). “Постсоветские парады. (разное)”. *LiveJournal*, 24 Feb. 2013. Web. Retrieved 10 May 2015. <[Http://yuri-ost.livejournal.com/28395.html](http://yuri-ost.livejournal.com/28395.html)>.