**Working Paper**

# RUSSIAN (IN)SECURITY:

# CULTURES, MEANINGS AND CONTEXTS

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## Introduction

In this paper I propose a cultural reading of security, focussing on Russia as a case study. Following Alexander Wendt's logic of "cultures of anarchy", I treat the sphere of security as generative of cultural meanings constitutive for international actors' identities. It is through discourses and images that different conceptualizations of security are constantly (re)constructed and applied to various policy issues[1]. In this sense, different security cultures can be discussed as regimes of signification and representation that are essential for (re)producing Russia's international subjectivity through a series of speech acts aimed to stabilize and secure Russian identity. As seen from this perspective, key issues are how various security discourses are instrumental for repositioning Russia both spatially (vis-à-vis its external Others), and temporally (vis-à-vis Russia's own past). It is this recurrent dynamics of interiorization and exteriorization of different meanings (through either textual narratives or imageries generating multiple self–other distinctions) that defines the cultural background of security debates in Russia.

For security studies cultural aspects are central due to direct association of security with identity, and the high prominence of the ideas of existential security. Cultural categories necessarily produce security conceptions due to the inevitable appearance of dangerous otherness that collective identities tend to expel from their cultural confines. Relations of acceptance and estrangements are key generators of security perceptions, and the figures of cultural "strangers" and "aliens" are major cultural protagonists of security narratives[2].

More specifically, in this paper I apply vocabularies and research approaches of the discipline of cultural semiotics for diversifying the debate on Russian security and bringing new dimensions to it, basically related to cultural meanings, contexts and connotations of security discourses. There are different ways in which cultural semiotics might be a helpful partner for security studies.

*First*, cultural semiotic insights might assist in understanding the subtle and even hidden meanings of security concepts, often less visible from other research perspectives. This is of particular relevance for unpacking ontological insecurity, a concept with deep societal and cultural underpinnings.

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[1] Matt McDonald. Securitization and the Construction of Security, *European Journal of International Relations* 14 (4), 2008, p.570 (563-587)

[2] Anti Randviir. Semiotic Status of Marginal Phenomena in *Different Types of Culture. How to Domesticate the Strange, in Identities of Peripheries. Minorities, Borderlands and Outskirts.* Tartu: VanaVaraVedaja5, 1997, pp.11-18.

*Second*, cultural semiotic optics is instrumental in problematizing semantic boundaries between the concepts we apply when dealing with security situations. A cultural semiotic gaze might put under question some of distinctions – temporal (between the Soviet and the post-Soviet), spatial (between Russia and Europe), and conceptual (between the geopolitical security culture and that of the war on terror, or between liberal and non-liberal approaches to security). A major contribution of cultural semiotics to security debate is its better contextualization and avoidance of clear-cut partitions and delineations. Thus, illiberal practices may spring up in a liberal milieu; in the meantime, as the further analysis shows, Russia both adjusts its security discourse to the liberal vocabulary and in the meantime lambasts liberal security recipes as detrimental and malign for international peace and stability.

*Third*, the cultural semiotic outlook at security is instrumental in scrutinizing and identifying differences between two discursive models – inter-subjective and dialogical, on the one hand, and auto-communicative and self-referential, on the other. The first model is well researched in the rich constructivist literature that is premised on the indispensability of constitutive references to a variety of others for producing discourses that stabilize our collective identities in general and perceptions of risks, threats and dangers in particular. Yet security situations might reverse the logic of inter-subjectivity and actualize discursive foreclosures in which security actors would prefer rather to isolate themselves from communication than to engage in it. This paves the way for plurality of totalizing and inward-oriented discourses that sustain and reproduce a binary type of thinking. Self-referentiality and auto-communication became pivotal elements of Russia's security policy, especially after the annexation of Crimea and the ensuing drastic deterioration of its relations with the West.

Against this backdrop, my main research questions are how different security cultures can be approached as cultural and semiotic constructs, and what this approach can tell us about Russia's security posture. There are several arguments I make in this paper. *First,* I argue that the main source of Russia's ontological (in)security is its oscillation between the Soviet and the post-Soviet identity discourses, with the latter being semiotically fragmented and dispersed. *Second*, I claim that in many respects Russia imitates Western liberal discourse yet de-facto plays a "reversed liberalism" game, contesting the practicability of norm-based association with either the EU or NATO. *Third*, I see the boundary between the security cultures of war on terror and geopolitics as inherently blurred, with anti-terrorist rhetoric widely used for reaching largely geopolitical objectives. *Fourth*, Russia's geopolitical thinking itself is transmuted into a combination of sovereignty- and biopower-related approaches to security as the main pillars of Russia's security policies, especially in the post-Soviet space.

### Russia's Ontological Insecurity and Dispersed Identity

The logic of cultural semiotic inquiry makes sense when it comes to the concept of ontological (in)security in which identity plays the first fiddle. Ontological (in)security "refers to the need to experience oneself as a whole… in order to realize a sense of agency"[3], as opposed to protecting against material harm and deprivation. Ontological security is correlative with "cognitive and behavioural certainty"[4]. By the

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[3] Jennifer Mitzen. Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma, *European Journal of International Relations* 12 (3), 2006, p. 342 (341-370).
[4] Mitzen. Op.cit. P. 342.

same token, "even a harmful or self-defeating relationship can provide ontological security, which means states can become attached to conflict"[5]. This approach elucidates a linkage between unsettled identities and high probability of the ensuing conflictuality potentially generated by existentially insecure actors, of which Russia appears to be an illuminating proof.

In the case of Russia, the validity of this argument is apparent due to the traumatic nature of the country's post-Soviet identity unveiled, in particular, by Serguei Oushakine's conceptualization of the "post-Soviet aphasia", understood as inability to clearly articulate the meanings of nation's collective self. As a reaction to that, the hegemonic discourse of Putin's regime seeks to "normalize" Russia through stabilizing its existentially insecure identity on conservative premises[6]; yet "unresolved questions of Russia's national identity" persist, preventing Russians from "clearly defining their post-Soviet values and international orientations"[7].

It is this penchant for an unachievable ultimate "clarity" that fostered the proliferation of Soviet practices in the post-Soviet Russia, a phenomenon rooted in social structures and instrumentally appropriated by the state. Given a panoply of realms of social life in which various Soviet-connoted cultural practices are maintained, the resilience of a multitude of Soviet experiences reproduced in today's Russia is not only due to their promotion by the Putin political project. The nature of the resurfacing post-Soviet practices lies much deeper in the socio-historic national memory and requires a greater attention to a variety of cultural contexts.

Arguably, the emergence of the post-Soviet Russia in 1991 left a number of substantial questions unaddressed. The Kremlin perceived the demise of the Soviet Union not as a chance to retrieve an authentic national identity (as most of post-Soviet states eagerly did), but as a deprivation, a disenfranchisement, a deep traumatic experience amounting to an irrevocable and irreparable loss of basic elements of national identity. Possible meanings of Russia's status of the successor of the USSR were only seldom a matter of professional academic debate. Is the succession a purely legal or a political concept, and where would a borderline between the Soviet and the post-Soviet be charted? Is succession meant to substantiate a special role for Russia in the post-Soviet area? Does it imply a preference to the Soviet legacy over the pre-revolutionary one? What elements of Soviet experience could/should be capitalized on and nourish the process of construction of the post-Soviet identity, and which should be better shed? Finally, why has the concept of empire as a continuous self-reference point proved to be particularly resilient in the Russian national identity discourse despite all the negative connotations and rebuke thereof in the West?

It is the under-conceptualization of the very idea of succession that left much room for incorporating Soviet practices in the hegemonic narrative of the Kremlin. This wash-out of borders between the past and the present is consequential for the (re)making of Russian identity. First, it betrays an interesting interplay of claims for Russia's political self-sufficiency and inherent feelings of deficiency of - and ruptures within - the Russian identity-in-the-making. Second, it is the blurred temporal borders

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[5] Mitzen. Op.cit. P. 342.

[6] N.A.Baranov. Osnovnye napravleniya ideologicheskogo diskursa v sovremennoi Rossii, *Politex* 8 (2), 2012, p.24.

[7] Andrei Tsygankov, Pavel Tsygankov. New directions in Russian international studies: pluralisation, Westernization, and isolationism, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37, 2004, p. 4 (1-17).

between the present and the conflict-laden nodal historical points/events that make Russia's identity-building dissimilar from the EU. Third, the ambiguity concerning the inscription of past memories in today's Russian identity leaves much room for integrating Soviet practices in the Russian Self.

In a curious manner, the Putin's hegemonic discourse equally valorizes the most controversial figures of the past, thus in fact refusing - or simply being unable - to politically distinguish national glory from national shame (as the Germans, for example, quite successfully did after the Second World War) while showing much neglect towards anti-imperial sentiments in a number of the former USSR republics, especially pronounced in the Baltic countries. Against this background, Putin's project can be viewed as an attempt to forge a consensus grounded in a combination of totalizing momenta with a profit-seeking guiding imperative. Putin's initially technocratic, managerial and non-ideological regime has incorporated many of the Soviet practices, simultaneously having blurred their ideological core. As any kind of post-political governance, Putin's rule looks for consensus as the constitutive principle legitimizing the power of the ruling group. It is in this context that the remnants of the bygone Soviet era were inscribed in the Kremlin policies.

The Soviet connoted ideas would plausibly not be half as resilient be they backed up by the cultural considerations alone. Post-imperial political overtones appear to be a part and parcel of nostalgia for the Soviet past. The arguments of a unique (positive) nature of the Soviet project, praised for unparalleled ideological aspirations, military might, and strife for achievements of fascinating technological goals (most prominent of which is probably the exploration of the open space) are central to the discourse on continuity of the vast Soviet legacy. The Kremlin appears to treat the artefacts and practices of the Soviet epoch as brands capable of strengthening the consensual and uniform momenta in the society. This explains why their most negative political effects are deliberately downplayed in stark contrast to handling those in more articulate and variegated public discourses. Soviet experiences are reinterpreted as implicitly unifying, conducive to domestic consolidation based on seemingly indisputable values of patriotism and the enhancement of the national spirit, and this perception feeds their instrumentalisation.

The Great Patriotic War memories play a key role in the Kremlin-sustained narrative. In Kremlin's reasoning, there are "true facts" and unwanted politically biased interpretations that possess a putative 'explosive capacity' of endangering the once established historic truth. The option of side-lining potentially subversive effects of the alternative historic readings should cement the prevalent historical narrative while impeding unwelcome re-interpretative encroachments. The crucial point here is that the Kremlin's historical narrative contains strong contemporary messages. Moscow wishes to underpin its constitutive role in the emergence of the EU integrative projects based on a set of normative values, while simultaneously underscoring the price paid by the Soviet Union for destruction of fascism in Europe. The issues of perpetuating normative divergences may thus become somewhat relativized, putting Russia's contribution to the foundation of post-war Europe to the fore.

The elevation of the 9 May to the rank of a major public holiday in Russia betrays strong security connotations. What inside the country is taken as a celebration of the great victory, which stands beyond political debates, acquires more political meanings within the framework of Russian security policy. In fact, Russia wishes not only to symbolically claim its right for an equal place in Europe, but also to politically distinguish itself from those countries that, in Kremlin's eyes, reinterpret the history of

the Second World War up to equating fascism with communism. It is due to the very ability to politicize and securitize the external meanings of the 9 May Victory Day (in Europe celebrated as commemoration/peace day) that in the official symbolic order it trumps other great events of the Soviet past, including Yurii Gagarin's space flight, the mass-scale transportation project (BAM, or the Baikal–Amur highway) or development of the "virgin soil".

This historical narrative is also actively instrumentalised for strengthening the regime domestically. What stems from the official articulations of the Great Patriotic War, as soon as it comes to security, is that the nature of the regime is in fact presented as a matter of minor importance compared to a state survival imperative. A message transmitted implies an unconditional allegiance and readiness of citizens to defend their home country, regardless of how good or bad the government is. This partly explicates the ascending securitization momentum promoted by the Kremlin not only as a presumably unifying tool, but also as a discursive instrument meant to keep in check the importance of such issues as the quality of government and the accountability of the ruling regime.

Thus, the variety of self-reproducing cultural discourses and practices based on Soviet experiences are paralleled by a self-sustained Soviet nostalgia grounded in (an imagined) grand past with strong innate ideological components. This explains the recurrence of the Soviet approaches in Russian foreign policy, with Putin's justification of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact as one of the best example of this. Moscow sees the Cold War model as corroborating the equal status of the Soviet Union vis-a-vis the West, and strictly protecting domestic politics from external influences. Within this neo-Soviet logic, the idea of saving Europe - either from neo-fascism or Islamic radicalism - is part of the mainstream discourse in today's Russia. Power connotations are predominant in this narrative: strong power is not that which provides high living standards for its citizens, but which protects them (and evidently itself) against foreign and domestic enemies and invasions.

Many of the political and security effects of "re-sovietisation" of the state-sponsored discourse are vulnerable to criticism: focusing on the seminal historic events forms a past-oriented identity; imposition of a mobilization paradigm/patriotic self-sacrifice mentality, irrespective of the regime nature and government quality, marginalizes the role of ethically and normatively maintainable ideological principles (like justice, equality, economic and cultural rights), etc. Reinvigoration of the (phantom) imperial pains and inward looking perspective prevents the much-needed borrowing/learning from the outside.

Different self-portrayals of the regime attest to the blurred and unfixed nature of Russia's identity. On the one hand, the Kremlin security discourse repeatedly refers to realist and geopolitical categories; yet the major problem with this is the glaring inability of Putin's elite to define the key realist concepts - national interests and rational calculus, which are very thin in Russian mainstream discourse. On the other hand, the regime often frames its security policies in seemingly ideological terms, with rhetoric of "spiritual bonds" and "moral values" that in the meantime are articulated as basically performative and symbolic concepts.

Putin's security philosophy remains eclectic and patchy, and based on poorly compatible and even irreconcilable principles: seeking recognition from and respect by the West, and at the same time annexing Crimea; promoting good relations with Georgia and simultaneously integrating its two break-away regions into Russia;

verbally treating Ukraine as a "brotherly nation" and at the same time waging an undeclared war against it, etc. These dislocations and discrepancies betray what might be called an ontological void in the regime's identity structure. More than a decade ago, the Russian writer Viktor Erofeev published a small - and largely intuitive - piece under a telling title "*Russia and Putin's Emptiness*" in which he claimed that the post-Yeltsin's regime lacks strong reliance on a set of socially accepted and well established meanings[8], and in this sense reflects what Oushakine called "post-Soviet aphasia" with its indistinct articulations of foundational principles and ample space for language games. This analysis holds true today. Most of the concepts constitutive for the regime's discourse can't be anchored and can mean many things. The Russian world can be synonymous with supporting Russian Diaspora all across the globe, or be tantamount to the religious "Holy Russia" concept, or can signify support for Russian language, or can be politically instrumentalized for the sake of orchestrating military insurgency in a neighbouring country. The same goes for Eurasianism - it can be a civilizational concept, or it can mean economic inter-governmentalism, or some sort of EU-modelled supranational integration with strong political accents.

The Kremlin, in fact, plays a double game in this respect. On the one hand, it has effectively appropriated the grassroots and rather autonomous manifestations of the Soviet nostalgia, and incorporated them in its hegemonic discourse based on patriotic consolidation revolved around Russia's triumphalist history. Russia capitalizes on its legal status of the successor of the Soviet Union, ascribing to it special duties/responsibilities in this area, which translates into a policy of treating most of its neighbours as junior partners at best. On the other hand, this reinstallation and rehabilitation of the Soviet practices and discourses foster both unintended and intended effects of politicization grounded in sharpening political debates and deepening political rifts within society, which became especially salient after Vladimir Putin's third accession to presidency in May 2012. And, of course, all this strongly reverberates in the sphere of foreign policy, since "for Putin the restoration of Russia's dignity is tantamount to retrieving the great power status after the collapse of the Soviet Union and humiliating defeat in the Cold War"[9].

In a nutshell, it is the precarious vacillation between Soviet remembrances and their still weakly articulated post-Soviet extensions that bolsters identity splits in today's Russia. In this situation, the concept of sovereignty was put forward as the main tool for stabilizing and unifying the hegemonic discourse, and avoiding its further fragmentation. It is not a legal concept, but political basis for Putin's system of rule, applied not only domestically, but internationally as well: Europe is largely perceived in the Kremlin as having lost its sovereignty and thus being subservient to the US. Yet sovereignty, the cornerstone of Russia's identity, is existentially insecure in the 21st century of globalization and trans-nationalization. It is the prioritization of sovereignty that only sharpens Russia's ontological insecurity, which turns into a fertile ground for multiple conspiracy theories and the constant search for external enemies. This feeling of an insecure Russian collective Self is also boosted by a lack of clear understanding of what is Russia: a nation state, a state - civilization (the Eurasianist version), a home to

[8] Viktor Erofeev. Rossiya i pustota Putina, *Inosmi.ru*, 15 March 2004, available at http://inosmi.ru/inrussia/20040315/208430
[9] Andrey Kolesnikov. Krivaya doroga Putina v Damask. Moscow Carnegie Center, September 30, 2015, available at http://carnegie.ru/2015/09/30/ru-61498/iigy

all Russian speakers regardless of borders (the Russian world concept), or a "holy Russia" (a quasi-religious community of a sort)?

## Discussing Security Cultures

In this section I discuss the relevance of the concept of ontological (in)security for four types of security cultures introduced in the project by Mary Kaldor.

### *Liberal security*

Russia's attitude to liberal discourses in various security contexts is marked by a deep ambiguity. On the one hand, Russian leaders are averse to liberal concepts and prefer to place Russia beyond the space of liberal values and the concomitant security practices. In Russian eyes, liberalism is intrusive and disrespectful to national sovereignties, and fosters further radicalization in non-Western countries affected by the policies of democracy promotion and regime change, including the colour revolutions in close proximity to Russia's borders. Moscow seems to be more interested in forging alliances with illiberal democracies, though the case of the Russia-Turkey conflict in 2015-2016 demonstrates certain limits of this strategy.

Yet on the other hand, Russia often utilizes liberal vocabulary in its communication with Western countries in the security field. In particular, such concepts as collective, equal and indivisible security are central to Moscow's "new European security architecture" proposal. Interdependence is another key word that from time to time appears in Russia's discourse. The concept of soft power, with its liberal intellectual pedigree, is part of Russia's official lexicon as well.

However, by resorting to a seemingly liberal wording, Russia appears to play a language game with the West. Moscow's strategy includes a rather sophisticated component that, along the lines of cultural and semiotic studies, can be dubbed a parody of Western normative language. In justifying its policy towards South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria and Crimea, by references to Western norms of responsibility to protect and human security, the Kremlin not only pragmatically uses the case of Kosovo as allegedly a precedent for similar – in Russia's eyes – manipulations with post-Soviet break-away territories. These "allusive imitations" are not simply replications of Western security vocabulary; they are discursive tools meant to "invalidate the normative authenticity of primary forms", contest and relativise "the scope, content and applicability of given norms"[10], and thus destabilise normative impact of Western security policies.

This discursive strategy leads to placing the ideas of liberalism, the democratic peace theory included, beyond Russia's practical interest. Besides, the depreciation of the liberal security culture stems from a more general disproval of the idea of liberal democracy, which in Russian hegemonic discourse is associated with disintegration and losses[11]. Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* are widely believed to be conducive to the tragic disintegration of the Soviet Union; Boris Yeltsin's democratic legacy

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[10] Erna Burai. Parody as Norm Contestation: Russian Normative Justifications in Georgia and Ukraine and Their Implications for Global Norms, *Global Society* 30 (1), 2016. P.p. 75-77 (66-77)

[11] B.A.Mantikov. Konservatizm v postsovetskoi Rossii: mezhdu nostal'gyei i utopiei, *Politeya* 1 (64), 2012, p. 45 (33-46).

resulted in centrifugal trends all across the country, with militant separatism in Chechnya being the most deadly example of this; and the cautious liberalism of Dmitry Medvedev triggered undue concessions from the Russian side to the West, especially in the case of the operation in Libya. It is the latter case I am focusing on in the following analysis.

Libya is largely perceived in Russia's political discourse as part of a global chain of victims of Western neo-colonialism and a policy of forceful regime change through colour revolutions in a group of countries such as Serbia, Iraq, and Syria. Moscow sees the Arab spring as a direct result of Western expansionist policy that leads to radicalization and chaos, instead of security. That makes the Kremlin think that the West is hypocritical and pursues a policy of double standards. This discourse of victimization is bolstered by attempts to draw parallels between Russia and Libya: both countries are rich in energy resources and therefore look for a greater economic independence, their structure of power is similar, both face centre–periphery tensions, and both were under Western sanctions.

Russian interests in Libya are believed to be directly affected by Western policy, and the permissive stance on Libya during Medvedev's presidency made Russia weaker and more vulnerable. Russia's losses are economic (Russia suffered from retreat from the arms market, and had to curtail industry and transportation projects with Gaddafi regime), geopolitical (Russia has military interests in the Mediterranean), and political (reputational costs of solidarizing with the Western military coalition at the expense of "national interests"). In this context, Russian hardliners are specifically critical of the role played by then President Dmitry Medvedev: they argued that the decision to refrain from veto power in the UN Security Council ignored the position of the Russian Foreign Ministry and was a grave mistake ("criminal myopia")[12]. Some voices assumed that Medvedev betrayed Russian interests as Gorbachev and Yeltsin did, and Putin had to redress this mistake, which partly might explain Russia's policy towards Syria since 2015. In particular, Vladimir Chamov, former Russian Ambassador to Libya, went public with saying that MFA was bypassed and sidelined in 2011[13]; while Alexei Podtserob, another former Russian Ambassador to Libya, accused Medvedev in taking a detrimental decision[14]. Evgeniy Primakov, former prime minister, post-factum suggested that Russia should have used its veto power and that "we were deceived by the West"[15]. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavov echoed by saying that "we won't forget the Libyan lesson", alluding to the disadvantages of Russia's defensive position. This "lesson" also includes an assumption that forceful demise of non-democratic regime is conducive to disorder, and gives floor to radical groups. Moreover, this logic goes on, no genuine partnership with the West is possible, since any flexibility leads to undue and costly concessions from the Russian side. Therefore, Russia's role in the world is to balance the aggressive West prone to global expansion, and Putin's leadership is a response to the challenges Russia faces.

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[12] Yurii Baranchik. Dal'neishaya politicheskaya kariera Medvedeva pod voprosom, REX Information Agency, January 23, 2013, available at http://www.iarex.ru/news/33497.html

[13] Alexandr Baunov. Malen'kaya tragediya posla Chamova, *Slon*, March 23, 2011, available at https://republic.ru/world/malenkaya_tragediya_posla_chamova-567855.xhtml

[14] Medvedev viol sebya kak prezident kolonii, *Nakanune.ru*, January 30, 2013, available at http://www.nakanune.ru/service/print.php?articles=7402

[15] E.Primakov : 'A s Liviei nas vsio zhe proveli', *AnnaNews*, February 10, 2012, available at http://www.anna-news.info/node/4391

To put it in more theoretical terms, liberal interdependence in the security domain, as seen from Putin's perspective, doesn't work for Russia, along with the ideas of global governance and great power management: Russia's commitments to G8 were seen as politically too costly. Since there are no prospects for normative convergence between Russia and the West, what remains is a combination of spheres of influence (the minimal demand), balance of power, and global contestation of Western institutions (NATO and the EU included), using all possible means (BRICS, Eurasian Union, etc.)

### Geopolitics-cum-War on Terror?

The domain of geopolitics contains many different versions, schools and approaches[16]. Cultural aspects are particularly meaningful for critical geopolitics, a school of thought that refuses to take geography as a "stable given", objective and "natural"[17], and deploys geographical factors within wider social, political and communicative framework. The very fact that existential insecurity is a major issue in geopolitical debates in a small Estonia[18] and huge Russia attests to the validity of the critical geopolitical interpretation of threats, dangers and menaces as discourses constructed beyond geographies and bent on their systems of self-other distinctions. In this vein, large territory can be conceptualized as a competitive resource or, on the contrary, as a burden; in the meantime small countries can think of their size and location (often between two or more competing poles) either as geographical disadvantage or, vice versa, as an incentive to build strategies based on such resources as attractive investment climate, tourist infrastructure, or e-governance. Borders can be seen as lines of separation, division and partition, or as meeting points facilitating contacts and communication[19]. In particular, Russia's Kaliningrad exclave could be imagined and developed as a pilot region for Russia-EU cooperation, or as Russia's military stronghold in the Baltic Sea having basically military significance. Donbass can be a name for a Russian-Ukrainian Euroregion, or a military battlefield, depending on security contexts.

In Russia geopolitics has to be deployed within the ambiguous framework of its complicated relations with the West. On the one hand, the original strategy of Russia's Europeanization was based on the presumption that Europe is "determined not by geography, but rather by common history, traditions, culture and a set of values"[20]. Yet on the other hand, a major geopolitical element in Russian security policy is the insistence on spheres of interests that, according to some promoters of geopolitical thinking in the West, have only two alternatives – "either a monolithic world system or

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[16] Virginie Mammadough. Reclaiming Geopolitics: Geographers Strike Back, in *Geopolitics at the End of the Twentieth Century. The Changing World Political Map.* Edited by Nurit Kliot and David Newman. London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2000. Pp.118-138.

[17] Merje Kuus. *Geopolitics Reframed. Security and Identity in Europe's Eastern Enlargement*. Palgrave Macmillan 2007, p.5.

[18] See for example: Pami Aalto. *Constructing Post-Soviet Geopolitics in Estonia.* London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

[19] Michel Foucher. The Geopolitics of European Frontiers, in *The Frontiers of Europe.* Edited by Malcolm Anderson and Eberhard Bort. London and Washington: Pinter, 1998, pp. 235-250.

[20] Merje Kuus. *Geopolitics Reframed. Security and Identity in Europe's Eastern Enlargement*. Palgrave Macmillan 2007, p.4.

utter chaos"[21]. It is the spheres-of-interest geopolitics that prevails under Putin regime and constitutes a pivotal element of its security policy.

There are three major points that need to be discussed in this light. *First*, I agree with those commentators who assert that in the specific Russian context distinctions between waging the war on terror and engaging with geopolitical projects might be blurred[22]. Of course, the two Chechen wars have to be basically seen through the prism of quelling terrorism in Northern Caucasus, while Moscow's policy towards Ukraine is dominated by geopolitical considerations; yet the Syria campaign seems to be a combination of these two security models. As seen from the Kremlin, the isolation in which Russia found itself after the annexation of Crimea and the support for military insurgency in Donbas, could be overcome by taking the lead in the war on terror. This reasoning explains why Russia refocused its attention to Syria, where it launched an unprecedented military campaign aimed at striking the infrastructure of the terrorists. In fact, the strategy of fighting ISIS became one of Russia's few tools to achieve its desired geopolitical gains – to gain acceptance from the West as an equal partner and thus downplay the negative consequences of Russia's intervention in Ukraine.

*Second*, in the Russian expert community there is a proper understanding of geopolitics as being a rather obsolete type of security thinking that is mostly shared by supporters of conspiracy theories portraying Russia as a victim of inimical encirclement by the West. Yet apart from this simplistic vision, Russian debate on geopolitics encompasses much more nuanced conceptualizations, such as the hybrid war concept that connotes the ideas of the post-industrial society. The Russian security expert Alexander Neklessa sees hybridity as an effect of a complex security environment that includes, apart from states, also actors with "movable territoriality and changeable borders"[23]. Hybrid wars are not aimed at occupying territories, which leaves much room for new security practices, including destruction by ISIS of cultural values that are symbolically important for civilizational identity of Europe.

Biopolitical vocabulary ought to be also mentioned in the context of diversification of Russian geopolitical discourse. A nice illustration of this came in his 2016 interview in which Putin openly claimed that, in the case of Ukraine, the issues of borders – an indispensable element of geopolitical thinking – are outweighed by the care about – allegedly endangered - people.

Biopolitics is different from the more traditional geopolitical approaches to security that deal "with a fixed object. Biopolitical security discourses and techniques deal with an object that is continuously undergoing transformation and change, through the manifold circuits of production and reproduction"[24]. Following the logic of the French political philosopher Michel Foucault, the key referent object of biopolitics is the population, rather than territory. Thus, biopolitical power is more concerned about managing lives, as well as supervising and disciplining human bodies, which

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[21] Geoffrey Parker. *Geopolitics: Past, Present and Future*. London and Washington: Pinter, 1998. P.137.
[22] Nicolas de Pedro, Marta Ter. Rusia en Syria: mas geopolitica que antiterrorismo, *Politica Exterior*, enero – febrero 2016, http://www.politicaexterior.com/articulos/politica-exterior/rusia-en-siria-mas-geopolitica-que-antiterrorismo/
[23] Sergey Medvedev, Alexandr Neklessa. Gibridnye voiny. *Radio Svoboda*, October 3, 2015, available at http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/27285199.html
[24] Michael Dillon and Luis Lobo-Guerrero. Biopolitics of security in the 21st century: an introduction, *Review of International Studies* 34, 2008. P. 283 (265-292).

strongly resonates with the concept of human security[25]. Foucault and his multiple followers claimed that biopolitics has to be distinguished from sovereign power.

From the literature, it is found that "there is no biopolitics which is not simultaneously also a security apparatus"[26]. Yet how exactly is this nexus conceptualized? One common way would be to argue that "biopower is the bastard child of neoliberal societies, which have created elaborate systems of surveillance to control the body in pursuit of securitizing culture"[27]. Another logic – much more applicable to the Russian case - would start with supposing that "there exists a form of power which refrains from killing but which nevertheless is capable of directing people's lives… the care of individual life paves the way for mass slaughters… sovereign power and bio-power are reconciled within the modern state, which legitimates killing by bio-political arguments"[28]. Russian biopolitics (to be understood as a policy of protecting and taking care of the population, with the 'Russian World' at its core) contains strong religious, civilizational and linguistic components.

The events in eastern Ukraine in 2014-2015, with numerous Russian volunteers fighting "on their own discretion and risk" on behalf of Russia, without even being properly named and buried after their deaths, requires an explanation beyond the traditional categories of geopolitics. The phenomenon of "biopolitical patriotism"[29] has to be discussed as a good reminder of the broad possibilities of the state to stay aside, and even deny sending their armed people for a military mission, yet in the meantime taking advantage of the patriotic mood in the society. As the experience of Russia's intervention in Ukraine made clear, this patriotism is transformable to the vague and loosely articulated ideas of the "Russian world" as a family-like organic community, or Russia's civilizational self-sufficiency.


**"New Wars"**

Russia's positioning within the new wars concept is, again, rather precarious. *On the one hand*, in eastern Ukraine Russia engaged itself in instigating a cross-border war of a "new" type, basically relying not on regular armed forces, but on mobilization of ideologically motivated Russian world zealots, marginalized and criminal groups, and mercenaries. The official Kyiv – backed, at least rhetorically, by most of its Western partners – dubs the military campaign against Russia-inspired separatists an anti-terrorist operation, which, from its part, also includes non-state armed units, such as the "Azov" battalion.

*On the other hand*, in Syria Russia seeks to play a qualitatively different role – that one of a decisive and allegedly effective warrior against international terrorism and

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[25] Steve Smith. The increasing insecurity of security studies: Conceptualizing security in the last twenty years, *Contemporary Security Policy* 20 (3), 1999, P. 84 (72-101).

[26] Michael Dillon. *Biopolitics of Security. A Political Analytic of Finitude.* London and New York: Routledge, 2015. P.46

[27] Julian Vigo. Biopower and Security, *Counterpunch*, May 5, 2015, http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/05/05/biopower-and-security/

[28] Mika Ojakangas. Impossible Dialog on Bio-power: Agamben and Foucault, *Foucault Studies* 2, 2005, p. 26 (5-28).

[29] Andrey Makarychev. From Chechnya to Ukraine: Biopolitical Patriotism in Times of War. Washington DC: the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, September 9, 2015, available at https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/chechnya-to-ukraine-biopolitical-patriotism-times-war

protector of territorial and political integrity of the country badly affected by civil war with radical groupings. It is this sense of mission and role identity that Moscow wishes to transform into a policy resource to boost its international status in the eyes of major Western governments and prove itself as a resourceful actor in the global war on terror.

Indeed, as a way to do away from the current isolation from Western security institutions Russia proposes itself as a security partner: in particular, in December 2016 Russian envoy to the EU Vladimir Chizov suggested that Moscow could consider sending its military units for joint operations with the EU[30]. Yet so far Russia failed to attain the strategic goal of obtaining acceptance and legitimation from the West in security domain. Moreover, in result of the two parallel military campaigns Russia found itself squeezed between NATO and the EU, on the one hand, and radical Islamism, on the other. The tragic assassination of Russian Ambassador to Turkey in December 2016 attests to Russia's vulnerability as a target for the multitude of militant Islamists eager to punish Moscow for its campaign in Syria. Unfortunately, in this direct confrontation Russia doesn't have good chances for support from Western governments that have all reasons to see Moscow as a competitor and rival, rather than as a security partner.

The two campaigns in which Russia has chosen to get involved to a very significant degree affected Russian security thinking, with the appearance of a highly militarized discourse aimed not at preventing a major war, but rather at getting better prepared for it and ultimately winning it[31]. Nuclear war is not a taboo any longer: President Putin mentioned that in the case of Western resistance to the annexation of Crimea Russia has been ready to use its nuclear power[32], and a Russian policy commentator has openly called for a nuclear response to Western sanctions imposed on Russia[33]. This rhetoric distinguishes Putin's regime from its Soviet predecessor: the Soviet "friendship of people" - with all its falsity - was substituted by aggressive hate speech that legitimized itself in the mainstream discourse under Kremlin's patronage, which includes repressions against commentators, journalists and bloggers who publicly express discontent with Russia's military operations in Ukraine and Syria[34].

## Conclusions

In this paper I have discussed various types of security cultures against the backdrop of Russia's recurrent identity crisis that dates back to the traumatized dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ensuing ruptures within Russian collective self. A "new" Russia, in spite of all attempts to distinguish it from the Soviet Union or to dissociate it from a "malign" Europe, in fact is deeply sutured both in its own

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[30] Rossiya zayavila o gotovnosti k voennomu sotrudnichestvu s Evrosoyuzom, *Lenta.ru*, December 14, 2016, available at https://lenta.ru/news/2016/12/14/military_cooperation/

[31] Vasily Mikriukov. Esli budet voina, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, December 18, 2015, available at http://nvo.ng.ru/gpolit/2015-12-18/1_war.html

[32] Putin o primenenii yadernykh sil, *Youtube*, May 7, 2015, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQKfBbUt5h0

[33] Mnenie: yaderniy udar – rossiyskiy otvet na sanktsii, *Youtube*, November 23, 2014, available at

[34] Tyumenskogo bloggera prigovorili k dvum godam kolonii-poselenia za post pro Siriyu. *Dozhd'-TV*, December 20, 2016, available at https://tvrain.ru/news/bloger-423799/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=nemnogo-ada-vam-v-lentu

communist past and in the idea of Europe, although differently understood by the Kremlin. It is this long-standing paradoxical vacillation between hardly compatible reference points that ultimately predefines the patchy character of Russian security positioning and the fragmentation of Russian security discourse. Multiple inconsistencies and controversies that we have identified in our analysis come from splits within the hegemonic discourse, rather than from its contestation by alternative security narratives.

Russia's take on each of the four security cultures discussed in this paper is marked by imbalances and oscillations. Russia's attitudes to the liberal understanding of security are controversial in the sense that they are a combination of aversion and rejection of liberal premises, on the one hand, and adaptive mimicry to them, on the other. In the case of geopolitics Russia, along with a rather traditional reading of this doctrine with strong conspiratorial notes, also engages with combining geopolitical ideas with a more diversified set of approaches grounded in hybrid war theories or biopolitics. The proliferation of a "new" type of warfare and the reaction to it – the war on terror – makes Russia's security stance even more controversial: Moscow wishes to play a role of terror fighter in Syria and, in the meantime, fuels armed revolt in eastern Ukraine.

All these rifts elucidate multiple discontinuities in Russian security cultures and a lack of cohesive security strategy. Russia both adapts – through imitation, mimicry or parody – to the dominant structures and practices of security, and seeks recognition of its great power status from the West, yet in the meantime deflates its security credentials and exposes itself more as a problem that as a solution. Under these conditions Russia runs a risk of unilaterally responding to various security challenges and ultimately get entangled in military confrontation along several frontlines at a time.