



**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKIYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE**

**GEOPOLITICS, NATION, AND EMPIRE: CONSTRUCTION OF RUSSIAN
IDENTITY THROUGH PUTIN'S NARRATIVE ON
UKRAINE AND THE WORLD**

Master's Thesis

Alican KUTLU

Political Science and Public Administration

NOVEMBER 2022



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ABSTRACT

Putin took revisionist foreign policy decisions by launching an offensive against Georgia, annexing Crimea, and after attempts of destabilization in Donbas, finally invading Ukraine. While these could be regarded as mainly strategic moves to increase power, Putin took pains to claim other less material reasons for action and made moralizing speeches and indeed wrote a historical article that he pleaded scientific without referring to historians. While Putin's moves were characterized as neo-colonialism in academia and media, he invoked concepts of Russianness, ethnic, national, and historical symbols and utilized a nationalist rhetoric. Analyzing Putin's political framing during key moments of foreign policy making, we would like to understand how he defines Russia and Russianness, to place his narrative of Russian identity, Russia's relations with Ukraine and Russia's place in the world in a historical framework, and critically evaluate his assumptions and propositions. We argue that Putin aims to reconstruct Russian "imperial-national identity" as encompassing concepts of nation, empire, and state. This type of identity enables him aims to re-assert (i) an ethnic national identity among the three Slavic nations of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians and the Russian diaspora, (ii) a non-ethnic national bond non-Slavic nation of Russia and even with former Soviet peoples, thereby simultaneously constructing Russia as a nation-state and a regional hegemon.

Key Words: Nationalism, Imperial, Identity, USSR, Russians and Ukrainians

ÖZET

Putin, Gürcistan'a düzenlediği saldırıyla başlayan revizyonist dış politikasını; Kırım'ı ilhak ederek ve Ukrayna'yı çeşitli yollarla istikrarsızlaştırmaya çalışmasının ardından tümünden işgal etmeye girişerek sürdürmüştür. Tüm bunlar güç arttırıcı stratejik hamleler olarak değerlendirilebilecekken Putin, bu hareketlerin moral zemini ile ilgili konuşmalar yapmaya özen göstermiştir. Dahası, bu doğrultuda; bilimsel olma iddiasında bir tarihsel makaleyi tarihçilere referans vermeksizin kaleme almıştır. Putin, bu hamleleriyle akademi ve medya dünyası tarafından neokolonyal bir anlayışı benimsemekle itham edilirken ve ayrıca Rusya tarihsel olarak ulusal değil, imparatorluk kimliği baskın bir ülke olagelmışken; Putin, Rus kimliğine ait birçok etnik, ulusal ve tarihsel sembole vurgu yaparak milliyetçi bir retorik kullanmaya başlamıştır. Putin'in kritik dış politika anlarında ortaya koyduğu politik kurguyu analiz ederek, onun; Rusya'yı ve Rus kimliğini; ulus devlet, imparatorluk ve milliyetçilik kavramları çerçevesinde nasıl tanımladığını anlama çabasındayız. Putin; ulus, imparatorluk ve devlet kavramlarına eş düşen söylemleriyle "Rus ulusal imparatorluk kimliği"ni yeniden inşa etmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu şekilde bir kimlik kurgusuyla Putin; (i) Ruslar, Ukraynalılar ve Belaroslular halinde üç ulus ile Rus diasporasından müteşekkil yeni bir etnik ulusal kimlik üzerine hak iddia etmeyi, (ii) diğer taraftan, Rusya'nın ve hatta eski Sovyetler Birliği topraklarının Slav olmayan uluslarına etnisiteyi temel almayan bir aidiyet duygusu vererek Rusya'yı aynı anda bölgesel bir güç ve ulus devlet haline getirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Milliyetçilik, İmparatorluk, Kimlik, SSCB, Ruslar ve Ukraynalılar

ABBREVIATION LIST

CPSU	: Communist Party of the Soviet Union
EU	: The European Union
FSB	: Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
KGB	: Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)
NATO	: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
QCA	: Qualitative Content Analysis
RF	: The Russian Federation
RSFSR	: Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
USA	: The United States of America
USSR	: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWI	: First World War
WWII	: Second World War

PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work. I declare that this thesis is written according to the writing rules of Social Sciences University of Ankara, Institute of Social Sciences.

Name and Surname: Alican KUTLU

Signature:

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Putin took revisionist foreign policy decisions by launching an offensive against Georgia, annexing Crimea, and after attempts of destabilization in Donbas, finally invading Ukraine, leading the enormous human suffering presently. All the while he was articulating a narrative, in which he claimed Kyiv as the cradle of Russian civilization, deployed the historical concept of *Novorossiya* (New Russia)¹, expressed the nostalgia for the Soviet Union, rewrote Second World War history, enunciated the symbolic significance of Crimea for Russian identity, emphasized Orthodoxy and the concept of “Russian World”, and asserted historical rights in other former Soviet countries. Narratives govern lives. Putin’s narratives directly impact the life and death of many presently.

Political narratives are as important as political action because narratives construct collective identities, create hegemonies, and define the “truth”. Therefore, we would like to conduct a content analysis of the narratives of the Russian president. We would like to understand how Putin envisioned the Russian identity, how he links Russian identity to Russia’s mission in the world, and critically evaluate his discourse to understand the current political crisis.

1.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis aims to answer those questions:

Why are Putin’s narratives during his geopolitical advances towards Ukraine filled with references to Russian self? Why doesn’t Putin just frame them as strategic moves? How can we understand Putin’s narratives at the main turning points in his

¹Southeastern Ukraine and northern territories of the Crimean Khanate that was conquered by Katherine II in the 18th century.

relations to Ukraine and the West? What do those narratives mean for the development of Russian national identity?

To answer these inquiries, we will look for answer for the following concrete questions: (i) How does Putin define Russia and Russian in his speeches at the historical junctures vis-à-vis Ukraine? (ii) Is Russia a nation-state, an empire, or something else in these speeches? (iii) What is Russia's mission in the world?

1.2. THESIS STATEMENT

This thesis will argue that Putin aims to reconstruct Russian “imperial-national identity” as encompassing concepts of nation, empire, and state. This type of identity enables him aims to re-assert (i) an ethnic national identity among the three Slavic nations of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians and the Russian diaspora, (ii) a non-ethnic national bond non-Slavic nations of Russia and even with former Soviet peoples, thereby simultaneously constructing Russia as a nation-state and a regional hegemon.

As believed by Putin, Russian identity has ethnic (primordial) dimensions (consolidated by Russian states mainly Kievan Rus', Muscovy, and Russian Empire) and imperial dimensions at the same time. Ukrainians and Belarusians are also included in the Russianness because they are both ethnically a part of Rus', lived within the Russian state (even though just partly the Russian Empire and Kievan Rus') and were civilized and flourished by dint of the Russian Empire. At the same time, Russia is more than a nation-state for Putin, it is a messianic empire therefore its influence cannot be demarcated with borders. According to Putin, different than interest-oriented Western Empires, Russia has a moral mission of struggling against Western hegemony and “corrupt” values, and re-assert “Russian” values. This formulation requires marrying of nationalism with imperialism.

Putin's narratives represent a crisis of Russian identity because Russia could not transform into a nation-state like other former Soviet states. Russian identity has been re-constructed on the memory of the imperial history of the Russian Empire and even the Soviet Union, and Russian politicians and particularly Putin does not want to process and

relinquish this memory, come to terms with dissolution and form a civic and multiculturalist state.

1.3. METHOD

In this thesis, we will use the content analysis method to examine Putin's selected speeches and article at historical benchmarks to understand his views on various topics around Russian nationalism and nation. Our methodological approach is interpretative as we accept identities to be constructed through discourse. Even though the construction of identities is a social and interactive process, the elite's narratives are important to suggest identity frames, which might or might not have resonance with people. Elites are not only affected by sentiments of the masses and possible prospects of acceptance of their frames, they also engage in creativity and demonstrate leadership to make ideational breakthroughs and offer solutions to current political problems. Therefore, it is important to scrutinize narratives of elites as a starting and focal point of identity framing and formulation.

Content analysis has surfaced as a method of understanding studies of propaganda techniques that occurred in World War II (Morgan, 1993). One of the leading figures of the content analysis was Lasswell who focused on propaganda analysis of Nazi Germany. In this way, from the very beginning, the content analysis was interpretative (Schreier et al., 2019). The data of qualitative content analysis are written documents or oral speeches extracted from the texts. Qualitative content analysis is a suitable method when the data is not solid and could not be framed before. It is a method that meets the requirements of interpretation within the scientific borders (Morgan, 1993). Qualitative content analysis affiliates the data, the words in this matter with interpreted meanings. The fundamental motivation of the qualitative content analysis is to create new knowledge-based ideas derived from the interpretation of the raw - undifferentiated data (Selvi, 2020).

One of the stages in which the interpretative core of the qualitative content analysis is unveiled is generating codes. Almost in each case, the qualitative content analyzers are extracting the codes from the data itself in contrast with the quantitative researchers who are applying ready codes to the data. Qualitative content analysis needs

a careful reading of the sources because of that dependency (Morgan, 1993). The procedure of segmentation includes partitioning the data as subcategories of the coding frame (Selvi, 2020). The coding frame is the main tool in QCA to make the newly created data is to be labeled for more easy understanding (Selvi, 2020). By using the sub-method of the coding frame, the qualitative context analysis ensures being systematic as much as it excludes unrelated parts of the material with the concept. Pursuant to Schreier, the fundamental aspect of content analysis is to reduce data into framing fields (Schreier et al., 2019). On the other hand, in some cases, especially the cases related to politics and politicians, the studies are about contemplating the unsaid, revealing the blanks, and predicting the suitable items for filling. We must not forget that terms, ideas, and definitions of politics are in flux and unsteady. Qualitative content analysis in this sense is not intensively standardized but data that is rather crude.

Qualitative content analysis stressed not the explicitly expressed meaning but the implicitly covered, latent meaning. To understand the hidden meaning, qualitative content analysis requires fostering a coding frame extracted from the differentiated data of the actual work besides high flexibility. By providing interpretation, qualitative content analysis juxtaposes different meanings of the narratives (Morgan, 1993). Contingent on undifferentiated content, qualitative content analysis is forced to maintain the whole data - the transcriptions attached with the rest of the work (Selvi, 2020).

In this thesis, we codified Putin's selected speeches systematically and put codes into categories, and categories into themes. As we would like to understand the role of Putin's relations to Ukraine and the Western states in Putin's thinking about identity, we focused just on the speeches given in historical conjunctures related to Putin's policy on Ukraine and Europe. A limited number of speeches could be examined; therefore, analyses are limited to these sources but these sources are quite crucial and representative. The speeches were prepared ahead and conducted during Putin's revisionist foreign policy moves such as annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine or during the 2007 Munich Conference when Putin for the first time shocked the world with his revisionist views. His historical article is the one and only and quite extraordinary as he is not a historian by education or profession. We included that as the purpose of the article is not academic but a declaration of truth regime as speeches. We do not focus on Putin's spontaneous speech or meetings with public because we would like to understand both

his consolidated views as a politician and policymaker as well as the views of the policy network he belongs. These speeches and article are prepared; therefore, we believe they represent consensus of a discursive network that is the ruling elite.

1.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE THESIS

This thesis has some limitations. Texts and sources could not be examined in the Russian language, which could definitely provide a more direct understanding of cases and thus more qualified content analysis. The narratives are chosen selectively to present landmarks of the Putin era. The limited number of narratives and the time gap between the narratives limit the conclusions of this thesis.

1.5. PLAN OF THE THESIS

In Chapter 2, after discussing methodological approaches to Russian history, we critically engage with multiple historiographical claims and strive present the development of Russian ethnic-national and imperial identities from a de-colonization perspective. We particularly pay attention to the multinationality and multiculturalism of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the hegemonies and colonization, and agencies of peoples as well as the state. We emphasize how the building of the nation, state, and empire is interwoven in Russian history.

In Chapter 3, we discuss Putin's political career and his consolidation of power in order to understand his political views better. We also examine various thinkers that influenced Putin to understand the context of his ideas, and trace learning and borrowing from these influencers.

In Chapter 4, we first provide a literature review of ethnicity and nationalism literature and suggest that nationalism can be decoupled from ethnic identity. Both ethnicity and types of national must be conceptualized as basically socially constructed. Second, we provide a review of literature which tries to understand the making of Russian national identity, and underline the model emerged from that literature - imperial

nationalism. We offer a conceptual framework to conduct analysis of Putin's narratives as to the content of imperial nationalism emerging in his narrative regarding Ukraine and the West.

In the conclusion, we provide a summary of the thesis, present main results of content analysis, and what it means for Putin's political actions. We also point out possibilities of further research.



CHAPTER 2 – EMPIRE, STATE AND NATION IN RUSSIA

2.1. EMPIRE, STATE, AND NATION IN EURASIA

There are several approaches in the study of Russia and Russian and Soviet political systems. They can be generally explained as such. The first approach is Russia/Orient approach (Russia as oriental despotism). The main proponent of this approach, Richard Pipes views Russia basically unique or exceptional in a negative way and argues that because of patrimonialism and the absence of private property, Russia is structurally destined to be a dictatorship. Another strain in Russian exceptionalism is neo-Slavophile essentialism that which viewed Russian uniqueness as positive and criticizes over-westernization periods contaminating Russian purity. In this approach, Russia cannot become a modern nation-state in the European sense. While non-Russian nationalities are not mentioned or just footnotes, it is implied that Russia's eternal form will be a non-democratic empire. This approach has reflections in the Soviet intelligentsia as well. While Lenin argued that the revolution was to draw a line between Russia's backward autocratic past and communist internationalism, late Soviet Communist party leaders tended to regard the Soviet era as an extension of Russia's indivisible history (O'Connor, 2008).

Challenging Russia/Orient approach, Karpovich distances imperial Russian history from its successor despotic Soviet Union (Karpovich, 1932). What is called the Russian state school approach of Russian nation building by Chicherin (Rabow-Edling, 2012) and Soloviev (Karpovich, 1946) focuses on bureaucracy with Karamzin (Saunders, 1982), and Russian state-building and institutions as the core of Russian civilization. Solzhenitsyn accepts WWI as the beginning of Russia's abandonment of the European path and descent into oriental despotism. Communist period does not represent the real Russia.

This school has a reflection on Russia in the sense of Russian messianism. Various definitions of Russian messianism has reflected how the term has changed over time as Russia's from being fated to be guide of humanity (Siljak, 2016), world domination (Shlapentokh, 1992), a Russian core embedded in Russian Marxism aimed to liberate the world (Krahn, 1963, p. 214) to an alternative doctrine to American uniqueness and Western dominancy (Engström, 2014, p. 357). Shlapentokh has argued that the imminent result of the collapse of Marxist ideology in Russia was diminishing the messianic type of Russian nationalism which was inseparable from Russian interpretation of Marxism.

In parallel to 'westernizers' (*Zapadniks* in 19th century) before, Soviet Union/Modernization approach accepts the Soviet Union as the modern Russian state and Soviet citizens as Russians. Starting from great Reform of 1860s bureaucrats began to pull the peasant backward Russia from stagnation into social change. The Stalin period however cruel was also acknowledged as one of the substantial progress, massive investments in the welfare state, and upward mobility. Some even envisioned a convergence of bureaucratized capitalist West and modernizing Soviet East. The modernization approach situated Russia in global history and believed in global homogenizing effects of modern, industrial, and technological societies. Ethnic, national, and religious differences have less meaning in the emerging world. In fact, they argued the Soviet Union would also resolve the national problem. Culture is perceived as dynamic and fractured not static. Social history writing and focus on macro systemic trends went beyond intellectual or institutional histories in this approach. The application of the framework of nation-state is largely unquestioned in the modernizationist approach.

Eurasia's anti-paradigm approach propagated by Mark von Hagen, *Kritika*, *Ab Imperio* and *Nationalities Papers* journals aims to remedy problems with the above approaches. Von Hagen proposes that the monolithic and static cultural determinism of Russia Orient approach though accounts for the importance of longer-term ecological, demographic, economic, and cultural structures fail to understand tremendous change that has been the focus of the Soviet Union/modernization paradigm. Eurasia anti-paradigm, which is influenced by post-colonialism and therefore which does not claim to be hegemonic intellectually, suggests various alternative paths of development for Russia that challenge the essentializing and exceptionalist rhetoric of these political and intellectual forces. This approach underscores beneficial influences of Asia and Russia's

own Asian communities on Russia, mixings of subcommunities and identities that were shaped by and that helped shape the Russian and Soviet empires, and population mobility and exchange of ideas and goods in the borderlands of the empire. We must note that this approach differs from the messianic view of Russia-Eurasia by emigre intellectuals and conservative, often xenophobic, neo-imperialist, and Nietzschean anti-Modernism of current Eurasianists (von Hagen, 2004, p. 447).

This thesis adopts a similar approach to the Eurasia anti-paradigm for understanding Russian identity with all its ethnic, cultural, national, and imperial connotations. This paradigm enables focusing on the multinational nature of Russian identity, its interaction with Russian diaspora, Russianized or Russian-speaking communities and claims of “Russianness” of Ukrainians and Belarusians, trajectories of constructions of Self and Other across Russian history in contemporary political discourse in Russia. The below is an attempt to provide a historical overview of the development of nation and empire and focus on the role played by ethnicity, nationalism, colonialism, and nationalities in the making of Russia.

2.2. ORIGINS OF STATE AND NATION IN RUSSIA

Kievan Rus' is the first historically proven East Slavic state. Various sources have not reached a compromise on whether the first known ruling dynasty of the Rurikids had come from Sweden or extracted from native people. Kievan Rus' settled alongside trade routes that been carrying fur and enabled storing and this facilitated the emergence of the state. Without the trade routes that tied Northern products with the Byzantine Empire, there would have been multiple contested states in the region. Trade, not only with Byzantine but the Islamic world, Europe, and eastern stretched steppe made Kievan Rus' wealthy and prosperous even before the Mongol invasion. Kievan Rus' as in the Muscovy and Russian Empire had a tradition borrowed from Byzantine Empire, that is the monarch does not maintain any religious authority in contrast with European secular and religious dual powers.

2.2.1. The First Eastern Slavic state and the Origins of Russians and Ukrainians

Historians have usually interpreted the origins of Kievan Rus' to serve and meet the needs of the concurrent times. During the imperial Russia period, Russian historians have assessed composed of "Great Russians" in which Ukrainians and Belarusians were subgroups. As maintained by Soviet historians, Kievan Rus' was composed of three East Slavic nations Great Russians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians. In contrast, modern Ukrainian historiography sees it as the first Ukrainian state. According to Plokhy, each view represents primordialist approaches to contemplate and root modern nations in the non-nation past (Plokhy, 2006). Above all, Kievan Rus' was accepted as the first template for the basics of Russian culture and religion (Thompson, 2009, p. 13). Baptized in Orthodox Christianity, formulation of the written form of Russian language in Cyrillic alphabet was the essentials that will later be observed in a single political unit of Muscovite (Ziegler, 2009, p. 9). Byzantine Christianity, that is Orthodoxy, became state religion of Kievan Rus' in 988. Despite its distinct form of Christianity and relatively isolated geography, Kievan Rus' was not far from European political culture as later. Assemblies of Duma and *Veche* were strong obstacles to exercise absolute power in Kievan Rus' (Thompson, 2009, p. 31; Kenez, 2006, p. 2). Rather than institutional serfdom of Russia, the *veche* was a town council mostly crowded by merchants. One of the theories about emergence of Kievan Rus' has argued that its existence was due to the need of protecting fur trade from Scandinavians on behalf of the Byzantine Empire and thereby insists on the commercial character of the Kievan Rus' (Gleason, 2009, p. 39). Whenever that trade route was endangered, Kievan Rus' have recruited armies even against their benign partner Byzantine Empire (Gleason, 2009, p. 52; Franklin & Shepard, 1996). In the Kievan Rus' hemisphere, city-state, Novgorod's *veche* had even more power holders from collecting taxes to deciding war and peace even though duties and rights of the sovereigns and people were not frankly written down as it was in Magna Carta. We must not forget that Kievan Rus' was not on an island as England. Their geography was vulnerable to invaders and during Mongol conquests geography has decided the future of the Rus' land and has deeply differentiated it from the rest of the Europe. Besides geography, Orthodoxy and Mongol invasion were other major contributors to isolation of Rus' from Western Europe (Kenez, 2006). Hundreds of years repression under Mongol rule will entrench and

legitimize authoritarian regimes for the next generations of Russian state (Ziegler, 2009, p. 19).

After the 14th century “Great Russians” have dominated Eastern Slavic societies and political formations (Thompson, 2009, p. 48). As origins of the Slavs, origins of the Rus' is not clear. The word Russia has evolved from Rus', and Rus' was the name of traders and warriors who have been operational in Kyiv and northern territories of today's Russia (Thompson, 2009). Nationalistic Russian historians have rejected claims on the Scandinavian origins of Rus'. There is discord over whether modern Russian national identity has derived from Kievan Rus' or Kievan Rus' have been sharing further features that have composed of Ukrainian and/or Belarusian identities (Plokhy, 2006). Igor' Danilevskii has questioned the role of the Kievan state in the formation of the old Rus' nationality and was suspicious whether Kievan Rus' authors had any national consciousness at all (Igor' Danilevskii, 2001 as cited in Plokhy, 1987). For the Primary Chronicle, written in 12th century as the main source that most of the information about Kievan Rus has been extracted from, the word Rus' was directly referring to Scandinavians, and later, the Chronicler seems to blend identities of Scandinavians, Slavic and Finno-Ugric people under an upper identity, the Rus' (Plokhy, 2006). In this sense, use of the Primary Chronicle for establishing Russian identity as an umbrella, supranational or imperial identity was itself an elite attempt to engineer a national identity.

Church and Rus'

Dependence of church to the state as it was throughout the whole Russian history has begun with Kievan Rus'. The Kievan Prince himself collected and distributed revenues of the Church. In contrast with minor place in politics, Orthodoxy has helped non-Slavic people's assimilation in Slavic culture. That was shined by introduction of Church Slavonic as a literature language after Christianization (Plokhy, 2006). Three Nation Problem, pursuant to Plokhy, the historical tracks are insufficient to answer the question whether there existed three distinct identities during Kievan State or the destruction of Kievan Rus' has led to separation of Rus' identity into Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian.

Mongol Invasion

After invasion of Kyiv in December 1240, nearly 300 years of Mongol hegemony over former Kievan Rus' territory has begun. Results of long Mongol era was embroiled with Mongol identities such as cruelty, repression, militarization and expansionism into Rus' civilization (Thompson, 2009). On the other hand, Edward L. Keenan has considered this transformation as creation of unique culture to serve Russia's geographical necessities (Keenan, 1986). Moreover, Russian expansionism has become the way of feeling more secure at the core of the state. Russia directed itself to east to prevent the reestablishment of Mongol rule (Kolarz, 1952).

2.2.2. Muscovite Russia (1240 - 1613) and Formation of Autocracy

In accordance with Soviet historiography, the disintegration of Kievan Rus' also means the division of Rus' identity into Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian nationalities (Plokhy, 2006). In contrast to the Soviet approach, Plokhy himself has evaluated the Mongol rule as the real manufacturer of the "Great Russian nationality" in the matters of defining its core territories together with a largely East Slavic population under a single political authority. In terms of Muscovy's political sphere, however, Ukraine was left outside and was controlled by Catholic Lithuania, Polish-Lithuanians and Crimean Tatars respectively (Ziegler, 2009). Geography again has determined the fate of Rus' after Mongol invasion, even its capital. Moscow, surrounded by dense forests had an opportunity to elude from frequent Mongol raids. In this way, Moscow has taken former role of Kyiv as the center of Russian Orthodoxy (Ziegler, 2009). The first sight of declining Mongol authority over Rus was the Battle of Kulikovo Field in 1380. Ziegler has perceived results of the battle as Russia's national awakening. Another touchstone of creation of Russian identity was 1439 Council of Florence and following event of Fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453. While the former occasion has given Rus' the idea that only they are the real defender of true Christianity, the latter has underlined the fact that they were the last independent center for Orthodoxy. Most of the historians have accepted these events as the starting points of Russian messianism.

Before Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible), it was impossible for a tsar to take crucial decisions by his own, without consulting with the boyars (the noblemen). However, in comparison with European aristocracy, the boyars were weak both in terms of numbers and class unity (Thompson, 2009). Muscovite state culture has institutionalized under the rule of Ivan IV. After waging long, expensive and unproductive wars against Western neighbors between 1558- 1582, Ivan abdicated as Russian tsar. Under the pressure of his cliques, he conditionally ascended the throne again. The condition has meant getting complete sovereignty from the moral restrictions of the Church to execute traitors. Lasting for seven years, a kind of planned civil war was conducted to eliminate the autonomy of the nobility, property owners and clergy by the newly created loyal militia, the *oprichniki*, which some liken to terror and Great Purge of Stalin. Once Ivan completed the civil war, his brutality turned against most of the *oprichniki* leaders through executing them and this has finally made him an unchecked despot. Ruslan Skrynnikov has described this as the tsar's withdrawing from de facto social contract with the grand princes and elites (Skrynnikov et al., 2015). Unlike established nobles of Western European feudals with formal titles and self-defenses of stone walls, the boyars of Rus' have had received their lands in the exchange for their compulsory services to the tsar. Without formal titles, the power of boyars has depended on an informal social contract (Skrynnikov et al., 2015). Neither family ties and royal marriages, nor how much the family itself had decent royal service past has not meant any kind of insurance against an always possible sudden fall (Crummey, 2014, p. 167). Having preferred arbitrary personal whim of politics to formal codes, Muscovite state has not developed representative organizations to share power, but the court politics had important advisory and even directive influence on the tsar (Kollmann, 2009, p. 95).

Economics and Society of Muscovite State

Conceptualizing Russian tsarist autocracy requires understanding its relations of production. Mongol conquest has cut the formerly vivid heavy trade routes of Kievan Rus' and thereby the economy has shifted into agriculture that needs less transportation of goods and interrelations of people. Irregular rainfalls had two impacts in this case. First of all, it has set the limits of local autonomy and thus, local nobles tied their promotions

to Moscow while they depended on the center for suppressing peasant revolts (Longley, 2017). As a result, according to Kliuchevsky, there were no independent classes in Muscovite political system akin to Kievan Rus' or feudal Western Europe (Wittfogel, 1963). Inconsistent climate causes difficult living conditions that create bilateral dependency of nobles on each other and unilaterally to the tzar (Skrynnikov et al., 2015; Turchin & Nefedov, 2009). Secondly, agriculture-dependent economy with fluctuating crops of inconsistent weather necessitated peasants strictly tied to their lands and this was gradually institutionalized and even codified by the law *Ulozhenie* in 1649. This law became a fundamental base for other Russian laws securing positions of the autocracy (Richard, 1988). On the contrary, Cossacks of frontier regions of Ukraine that have a tradition of free peasantry have shown resistance to Moscow's authority (Ziegler, 2009). Before institutionalized "serfdom" under the rule of *Ulozhenie*, movements of peasants from escaping high taxes and tortures of Ivan IV to south and east to the Urals and Siberia became a reason for Russian expansion (Hellie, 2009). Similarly, rebellious or loyal Cossacks settled up to the Lake of Baikal and the religious sects of Orthodox priests feared persecutions and escaped tortures settled in eastern territories and converted native people to Christianity (Kolarz, 1952). Religion has also played an important role in the institutionalization of serfdom. In Kievan Rus', the combination of weak central authority and high role of trade in economy have prevented serfdom. After 1453, to escape from heavy tax borders, peasants have moved to tax exempted monasteries and then sought to retain newly acquired workforce, many monasteries have appealed to Moscow to restrict peasants to move (Hellie, 2009). According to Hellie, the abolition of serfdom with the Emancipation of 1861 was left incomplete because of the fact that peasants have been levied by the redemption payments. The Revolution of 1905 has repealed the redemption payments and finally granted freedom to the peasants. Nevertheless, the collectivization of agriculture has introduced internal passports to restrict peasants' movement (Suny, 2016) and the introduction of forced labour camps (GULAG) has revived 300 years old tradition for the next 30 years.

Roots of Russian Messianism

After Muslim Turks breached the walls of Constantinople, Russians more assertively affirmed Moscow's legacy as the only center of true faith (Nadieszda, 2009). Russian Messianism was oppressive against any kind of opposition among Russians, who have tendencies towards Westernization, and expansionist to expand Russian culture and favors assimilation of new subjects of tsar through the Russian language. Therefore, Russian Messianism has paved the way for expansionism directed to mainly south and east. On the other hand, it has created isolationist policies in terms of relations with Catholic & Protestant Western powers. However, Berdyaev has defined Russian messianism differently. More gentleness, more pure humbleness and less thirst to power are the main features of Russian culture and makes it universal (Berdyaev, 2015, p. 253). Berdyaev describes Russian history and identity as an inorganic structure that does not show a unity/continuity. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that his emphasis on Russian thought is the universal and "messianic" character of Russian despite rejection of historical unity and continuity of Russians.

Development and Features of the Autocracy

The internal strife has weakened the Russian Church as a potentially expected rival for secular authority in Muscovite State as the church was in Western Europe. In contrast with being commercial centers of Western European cities, Russian cities were administrative centers built around garrisons but not markets, so there is no independent commercial class having economic privileges. Ironically, the heavily militarized Soviet socialist economy (Zaslavsky, 1997) could not escape the realm of militarized social structure stamped on Russian history. In this case, without independent productive and commercial classes, the tsar has become heavily dependent on centralized bureaucracy thereby the autocracy became natural state of Russia (Petro, 1997; Berdyaev, 2015; Thompson, 2009; J. B. Shaw, 2006).

2.2.3. State of Peter: The Emergence of the Russian Empire

Anisimov stated that Pyotr I (Peter the Great) was the creator of the administration – command system and the true ancestor of Stalin. He argued that Pyotr demolished alternative ways such as civil society and most tragically the Church, and created the "well-inspected police state" with its reliance on spying mechanisms (Anisimov, 1993). The state, on the other hand, was the steaming power of economic development in Peter's vision to catch the stronger West (Ziegler, 2009), with ruthless mobilization of labor force as exemplified in the construction of St. Petersburg at the expense of high human cost in region of 30.000 people (Osborn, 2006; Luhn, 2016). Again, with pragmatic reasons, Peter accepted completely the concept of autocracy, the idea of centralized absolutism (Thompson, 2009). Peter's perspective and Putin's vision that implemented in his first decade resemble each other. Each statesman were firm in the sense of centralization supported by suspicion of self-regulated institutions meanwhile opening doors to the West (Hughes, 2009). Hughes has ascribed the conquests of Peter on the southern shores of the Baltic to taking back patrimonial Russian lands, but it could not be possible to find any references about concurrent Russians who had made the same definition or a similar motivation for Peter's Baltic campaigns. The ways of legitimation of Russian expansionism differ from time to time. Catherine the Great, who has taken the latest Tatar Khanate, Crimea named it "New Russia" (Geraci, 2009), not Old Russia by referring Kievan Rus' legacy. 19th-century Westernizers and Slavophiles have widely contested Peter's radical reforms. Whereas Westernizers have praised Peter who was aware of Russia's backwardness and has made it equal to great powers by adaptation of Western culture and techniques, Slavophiles have been blaming Peter for ignoring and disrespecting the fundamentals and core of Russian values that have been expressed in "decontaminated" Orthodox faith and peasant communes.

Late 18th Century – A Constant Issue of Underdevelopment

An example from the incremental rate of iron production will explain how Russia was backward against the West despite the efforts explained above. The raw iron of Russia was more than in any other country, but production was low. The main inputs of

the industry were forced labor and feed as energy source. On the other side of the continent, British iron production leveled up twenty-four times (Field, 2009). These economic/innovative problems have become more visible in the Crimean War and the 1905 Russo-Japan War which both ended in shameful Russian defeat and led to radical reforms such as the abolition of serfdom in 1861 in addition to some democratic reforms of the 1905 Revolution.

The Question of Civil Society in Late Imperial Russia

Negligible power of Russian commercial middle class with surveillance functions of special police units dated back to early 18th century (Ely, 2009) in an economy based on agriculture than trade and a centrally appointed and controlled nobles were the obstacles for a development of influential civil society in Russia. In spite of these, as embodied in the Decembrist Revolt, a significant minority within society has already alienated with principles of the autocracy (Geraci, 2009).

Russian Stability – As a Source of National Proud

Not benefitting from overseas trade and its associated outcome of technological developments, Russians had a robustly centralized state that ensured comparative stability in comparison with Europe's endless chaos. In the 18th century, the distinctive political stability has prevailed and despite 4 of 9 tsars having promulgated by *coup d'états*, power transfers were smooth (Whittaker, 1996). Only organic character of national being accumulates stability (Ilyin, 2011, p. 169). On the other hand, Pugachev Revolt (1773-1774) and later on Decembrist Movement have signaled that Russian stability was not eternal. Especially Pugachev Revolt has found support from various groups from Cossacks to Bashkirs and Tatars who have felt deprived from their previous privileges and autonomy (Thompson, 2009; Ziegler, 2009).

Cultural Status, Nation Building and Russification

The acquisition of Turkestan has triggered the Great Game which was a struggle between Russia and Great Britain for influence over Central Asia, keeping India out of Russia's sphere from the British perspective (Fromkin, 1980, p. 936). Today's Eastern Ukraine was one of the earliest imperial occupations of Russia and integrated fleetingly into the Russian administration system that includes serfdom. In addition to this, a significant number of Russian immigrations has caused the exclusion of the region from other minority regions that military rule has governed (Geraci, 2009). On the other hand, in many Western provinces, Moscow has shared its authority with local assemblies such as in Grand Duchy of Finland and Kingdom of Poland (Thaden, 2016; Tishkov, 2008b). Therefore, the government style of Russia was not on the superiority of the Russian nation, but on getting and holding as much as territories possible, which would be explained a pragmatic approach to administrate "an empire-born nation" (Kolarz, 1952). With the annexation of Astrakhan Khanate, the absorption of former Mongol/Tatar rules has been praised in Christian Messianism.

That pragmatic approach was detected in the formation of elites. St. Petersburg and Muscovite aristocrats and bureaucratic elites were composed of different ethnicities of Germans, Tatars, Poles, and Ukrainians. In this respect, the governance concept was Rossiyan, not Russian. Nevertheless, to prevent any close interaction with their native people, the appointments of Pole servants have been usually dispersed away from Western regions and a similar application was prevailing for Armenian officials who were not preferred to be given posts in Caucasus.

Messianic religious oppression into the conversion to Orthodox Christianity has been considered as an inseparable part of early Russian imperialism. Pragmatism and resources, sometimes lack of educated clergy have given way to fluctuates in this issue. Catherine the Great and her enlightened humanism tried to adopt voluntarily minorities to Russian culture through religious tolerance. Later, during Nicholas I's era, "Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality" become the official slogan of Russian Empire in 1833. That slogan hosted a disagreement in it. Russian nationalists have attacked Orthodox missionaries who dedicated themselves to convert Muslim Tatars into Orthodoxy by teaching Orthodoxy in local languages. This tendency was opposite to the myth of pure Russification which has been formalized as "speak Russian, act Russian, and feel

Russian". In this sense banning and/or making less visible border incorporated nations' languages or assessing them as a close dialect of Russian (calling Ukrainians "Little Russians") were evidence of how language, especially compulsory Russian courses in newly obtained regions become a central tool for Russification. Catherine, although identified herself as an enlightened ruler (Griffiths, 1973) having sought to demilitarize Russian society has annexed Polish lands and other non-Russians and left serfdom intact to strengthen autocracy (Thompson, 2009). The war against Napoleon Bonaparte represented the highest point of Russian prestige in the continent that might only be comparable to afterwards of Soviet victory over the Nazi war machine in 1945. Peter and Catherine the Greats have modernized their countries and in 1814, Russian armies presented themselves as the defender of old European order in Paris as a new strong point for Russian messianism. Almost every sections of Russian society suffers and sacrifices in Napoleonic Wars and thus the sense of national glory and identity has raised (Raeff, 1991). As a result, a new fortress mentality has cemented the nation building process around Russian Messianism - Third Rome (Plokhy, 2006). Hellie has likened the relation between god or the unshakable truth that embodied in the existence of the tsar in Imperial Russia to Marxist dialectic in USSR that was considered above the discourses, stated absolute truth (Hellie, 2009).

Pan-Slavism

The term Pan-Slavism refers to the consciousness of ethnic kinship (Petrovich, 1966), race solidarity among Slavs (Levine, 1914), and a foreign policy tool for resistance to German-Austrian influence (Lieven, 2006). The history of Pan-Slavism goes back to 1472 when Muscovite Grand Duke Ivan III got married to the last Byzantine ruler's daughter with the vision of making Constantinople a further great Slavic Empire (Levine, 1914). Levine has also indicated that the first conscious Pan-Slavist of the Russian throne was Tsar Alexis (1645 - 1676) by initiating the creation of a common Slavic language. In contrast, Peter the Great was proclaiming the sufferings of Slav people under Ottoman rule until he was defeated in the Prut by Ottomans (1709) and turned his attention to Northern campaigns. Pan-Slavism became official policy not until Russian war efforts gained real momentum against the Ottoman Empire and was put in the Treaty of Kuchuk-

Kainarji (1774). Toynbee has attributed the Ottoman Empire's durability for four centuries till Kuchuk-Kainarji Treaty to securing its position of being the universal state of Orthodox Christian people (Toynbee & Somervell, 1987), and in this sense, Pan-Slavism became a significant tool for Russian foreign politics as Russia has obtained the guarantor status of Orthodox people within Ottoman borders. The natural rise of Pan-Slavism became evident in the 1860s as it has either encouraged Russia to incite Orthodox people's rebellions against Ottomans and emerged as an insurgent political movement among Slavs of Austria and Germany. However, the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent civil war in Russia has broken the chance that newly independent Western Slav states would incorporate with Russia. Thereafter, 1918 – 1921 Polish–Soviet War was the banner of for the end of the communist world revolution and Slavic roots have not eased war efforts between independent countries. On the eve of the Cold War, expectations of further political structures have shifted to economic and ideological alignments than boundaries surrounding racial/ethnic/cultural similarities. In this sense, the spread of post-war Soviet influence throughout Slavic countries has not presented the validity of Pan-Slavism. Instead of this, Slavic countries which previously experienced independence have not been satisfied with Soviet suppression (Guins, 1950).

1905 Revolution

Famous with his critics of French Revolution, Edmund Burke noticed that the state is an extraordinary contract bound not only alive citizens but previous and next generations and thus could not be terminated by daily concerns. Burke has blamed revolutionary forces for ruining natural balance. On the contrary, a century later, in Russia, the government itself revoked the contract. Three decisions of pre - 1905 has given way to the revolution of 1905 and more importantly, destroyed the myth of tsardom as the father of the nation. First was the advisor Sergei Witte's policy of forcing peasants to sell their products at a lower price than market measures to make capital for Russia's industrialization. This pushed peasants into discontent that surged by the defeat in the Japanese War, which was waged by Minister of Interior Vyacheslav von Plehve to get a quick victory to rebuild national cohesion. Another major cause for the Revolution was firing a peaceful march of masses in whose hands were holding tsar's portraits.

World War One

Russian patriotism and the idea of Slavic unity had impacts on the entrance of Russia into World War One, along with a motivation that a new war would dismiss peaking national disunity that surfaced through the general strike of July 1914. On the other hand, each part of the conflict has had projects akin to Russians. Thus, the global war has made the internal ethnic problems of empires as a useful tool for foreign affairs under the titles of Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism and, Pan-Turkism (Von Hagen, 1997). At the first stage of the War, the French plan was to keep German forces busy with the Russian army composed of outnumbering peasant masses to find time for completing her mobilization. Nevertheless, Russian offenses in the Western front have brought heavy casualties against German forces superior to Russians in terms of technology and also skills of commanders. Huge casualties have caused new recruitments from peasants that have created food shortages and crashed national morale. 1905 Revolution has eroded the wise image of tsars. According to Alexander Kerensky, the policies of the Duma Period – Constitutional Monarchy Era have fertilized the society for further steps. Praising socioeconomic developments, the constitutional imperial Russia has achieved between 1906 and 1914, especially in primary education and industrial output, Kerensky inserted that reactionary steps aimed to retake more power for Tsar, the tsar under his reactionary advisors was responsible for the 1917 Revolution. Anti-democratic measures did not only result in February Revolution that made Kerensky the president of the provisional government, but the imperial unity became fragile by the revolt of non-Russian insurgents. Alienation of non-Russians was due to anti-democratic measures of the tsar, by which he aimed to reduce the representation of other nations in the Duma insisting that decision-making processes of Russian related matters should be excluded from non-Russian votes (Kerensky, 1945). For Kerensky, patriotic anxiety that occurred after defeats against Japan has fed Russian nationalism and made the situation unmanageable. Ironically, whereas Russian nationalism has not made a significant impact on national unity, its raise turned non-Russians in a resilient sense. In this sense, Kerensky has shared the fear of the autocracy that ethnic-based Russian national consciousness among masses would destabilize monarchical hegemony (Brandenberger, 2000). For the first assessment, according to Walter Kolarz, the idea of 'mobile frontiers' that reflects gradual

Russian border expansion for four centuries has limited the sense of Russian patriotism which would require exact motherland borders (Kolarz, 1952).

The era of provisional government that has survived for only a few months was a situation of dual power. Kerensky has not stated but government's decision to continue war efforts have only served the escalation of the conditions. The Bolshevik Party has overthrown the government in an action akin to coup d'état. Bolshevik's promise was to end the war in a short time and secure self-determination for minorities. However, before the ratification of socialism in one country as the official policy of the USSR, dominant figures in communist Russia relied on the world revolution. Hence, in the first years of the revolution, the Bolsheviks were busy exporting their revolution by supporting other communist figures in Europe and employing military conflict that was postponed for two decades at the gates of Warsaw in 1921. In that meaner, such a government would not give up its efforts to regain non-Russian territories of former tsardom, namely Caucasus, Central Asia – Turkistan, and Ukraine. It was not only nationality policy but also formula of democracy has changed and converted into a new form at the Tenth Party Congress of the Bolshevik Party. Lenin has imposed rules against functionalism within the ranks of the Bolsheviks. Once the Bolsheviks banned other political parties and restricted autonomous social organizations, the party became the source of a new kind of autocracy.

2.3. NATIONALISM AND QUESTION OF NATIONALITIES IN THE SOVIET UNION

Bolsheviks on Nationality and Democracy

Kievan Rus' was a multiethnic state. Grand Duchy of Moscow did not have a long history without being multiethnic until it conquered the Kazan Khanate. Russification was always on the table but like the modernization process of Russia, which was based on concerns about lagging behind Western Europe and then stalled due to the fears of losing unique Russian culture, Russification was a cautious and two-step forward one step back policy. The inconsistency of Russification of non – Russian people because of their scattering in a great geography from Poland and Finland to Crimea, Caucasus and Central

Asia have also impeded the promotion of Russian consciousness. In addition to historical reasons and geographical vastness, Russia's socioeconomic infrastructure became hurdles in spreading Russian national consciousness. An undeveloped economy with small-scale urbanization, weak transportation and communication links that have prevented the development of internal markets have also hindered efforts for developing national consciousness among the masses. In addition to these, deep class cleavages, and cultural gulfs between intelligentsia and masses were other causes of negligible nationalism (Rees, 1998). As a result, hundreds of years of assimilation policies of Russia on non-Russians have failed and prevented the emergence of national consciousness among ethnic Russians at the same time because of its caution (Service, 2020, p. 62). A series of fluctuations shifting from freedom of cultural rights to repression of them have created a memory that led independence of various regions after authority in Moscow and Petersburg vanished in afterwards of the 1917 events. On the other side, many non-Russian people of the Empire such as Latvians, Russified Ukrainians of Ukrainian cities, and Armenians had supported local revolutionary branches of the Bolshevik Party instead of small-scale nationalist intelligentsia's independence movements (Suny, 1993a). However, this would not be enough for the Bolsheviks and in the following years, they will act against the naive Russian nature (Berdyayev, 2015, p. 196).

While the Bolsheviks initially insisted on worker solidarity, they quickly realized that the national identity is a more important source of motivation for many non-Russian peoples of the Empire. By drawing exact national borders for the minorities and institutionalizing them (Cadiot, 2005, p. 441), the Soviet nationality policy has made separate ethnic identities stronger. With the negative annotation of Nationalities Commissioner Joseph Stalin, who favored subordination of the minority groups within Russia, Lenin established a type of ethnic federalism. By contrast, Lenin and his fellow revolutionaries resisted sharing power with other political parties. This is the base for Putin's argument. For Putin, Lenin placed a time bomb under Russia with his nationality policy. Lenin's nationality policy besides banning any other political party than the Communist Party has led to the emergence of local powerhouses built on nationality. If politics is sharing power and bargaining on stakes, the only way in the USSR was putting forward local needs against central desires. One of the first results of the democratization

of the USSR is emerging ethnic tension (Tishkov, 1989, p. 191) should be assessed in this context.

Stalinism and Russification

Russian Social Democratic Labour Party later on Communist Party of the Soviet Union have been composed of various fractions. Whereas the Party was behind the October Revolution, Lenin, had a unifying personality over fractions guided the Revolution, and implemented the initial politics of the USSR. However, Stalin was the real founder of the USSR. Stalin has shaped the major politics of the USSR and despite the de-Stalinization process following his death, most of his policies have stayed in effect. Stalin's first principle was the possibility of socialism in one country. That principle has put the problem of securing the survival of the USSR in the first place. Rigid centralization with mass surveillance and purges, central command economy and cultural life, and creating a homogeneous society which sounds like Russification in practice were other principles of the state that were devoted to keeping the USSR out of internal and external perils.

"In Marxism and National Question", Stalin defined the term nation not as racial but as a historically developed stable community of people. After giving that civic kind of definition, Stalin divided European states into two concepts, national states of Western Europe and multinational states of Eastern Europe, in particular, Austrian and Russian empires. As Germans in Austria, politically the most developed nation in Russia, the Great Russians have united other nationalities around themselves. According to Stalin, in another Eastern European multi-national country, Austria, granted autonomy to nations but not territories, which implied that autonomy was based on the historical development of that society. Stalin has agreed with the idea that the utter democratization process needs banning any kind of national privileges and unrestricted federalism would lead secessionist demands (Stalin, 2021, p. 90). However, while Lenin seemed to be eager to give nations as much as autonomy that would be resulted in their independence, Stalin has put Russia at the center. He argued that independence of Georgia, Armenia, Poland, and Finland after the Brest Litovsk Treaty were illusions and only served to interests of imperial states. He concluded that potential new independent states concurrently placed

in the peripheries of the Russian center would not serve the interests of the people but serve at the expense of the revolutionary energy of central Russia.

The purges of Stalin on people and party cadres did not discredit the Bolshevik principles that have become a mix of Marxism and Russian messianism. On the contrary, a few anti-Bolshevik exiles (The White Russians) have praised the idea of a union of all people under the leadership of Russia dominant state, an ideal that had become imaginable by military-oriented rapid industrialization progress (Shlapentokh, 1992) even at the expense of high human cost. The anti-Bolshevik exiles were mostly Russian nationalists or zealously Orthodox people. Therefore, the ratio of Russian messianism in Soviet Marxism was so much that even exiled people who were against socialist rule could be consoled by this aspect of it. At the present, the belief in the messianic character of the Russian identity continues to bring many different segments of the society together on a common ground.

Russification of the Soviet Union might be the fate of the Union, however. First of all, ethnical and/or cultural Russians were dominant in the Bolshevik Party during the October Revolution. Secondly, the Revolution has depended on the industrial working class, and non-Russian parts of the Empire consisting of peasant masses have become class enemies of the revolutionary Russia, according to Bolshevik viewpoint. From North Caucasus to Central Asia, Russian revolutionaries have played the leading role to bound those territories to Moscow again, and to control titular nationalism, key positions in titular republics have been given to Slavs (Kolarz, 1952) such as KGB and communist party vice secretaries (Lane, 2002), and thus Russian intelligentsia loyal to Russian working class has sent those territories to make non-Russian peasants benign to Russian working class values. Quickly emerged new industrial complexes have profoundly depended on the internal migrant workforce with peasant backgrounds and who have escaped from rural areas compelled by collectivization (Zaslavsky, 1997).

Before World War Two, collectivization, industrialization and consolidation have strengthened the Russification of the Soviet Union. Collectivization has affected whole country and population flow across the country was unseen to that day. Owing to its percentage in the Soviet Union, Great Russians have gained new dots on the Soviet map. Great Russian settlers have replaced expelled *kulaks* of Siberian concentration camps and

other escaped peasants. The man-made famines in the collectivization process killed millions of Kazakhs, Ukrainians, and other nationalities, greatly decreasing their numbers, and even making them minorities in their ancestral territories. Communists wanted to spread industrial production well-balanced across the Union and in the process of industrialization, Russian industry workers have pioneered newly recruited workers from natives. Although Khrushchev has seen that as an opportunity for mixing nationalities (Low, 1963), this was an indirect shape of Russification with the power of Russian language and population ratio. Secondly, Russians have overwhelmingly inhabited newly constructed industrial cities (Lane, 2002) and those cities have become administrative centres of non-Russian periphery republics. On that ground, despite Russian language classes having been enacted as compulsory in titular republics in 1938, the Russian language was in a way being lingua franca in administrative affairs (Low, 1963). Consolidation, as political power consolidation in titular republics, means the expulsion of local communist leaders associated with national concerns. Russian communists sent from Moscow have taken their places. It followed purge of national intelligentsia. However, the policy of Russification was not a declared policy until WWII.

World War Two

Full-scale German offensive splashed through three fronts have compelled communist rule to become more tolerant of reminders of the imperial past. By justifying to put Russian patriotism, changing the war propaganda from anti-imperialist rhetoric to the motherland war and replacing national anthem of International to Sergey Mikhalkov's anthem that highlights the Russian nation above other peoples of the USSR and departure from Orthodox communism (Gleason, 2009; Brandenberger, 1999, p. 93), Stalin said that the population would not fight for them, communists, but people would fight for Mother Russia (Lomagin, 2009). After the War, in celebrations on May 24, 1945, Stalin has praised the Soviet people but before all, the Russian people insisting on Russians' leading role in the war and their superior features such as endurance, loyalty, and a clear mind (Gorenburg, 2006, p. 279). At the end of the war, the internal exile of deemed untrustworthy groups mostly Muslim origins would mean their identities being considered second-class (O'Connor, 2008).

Nation Creation

An approach that is consistent with Eurasia anti-paradigm is the institutionalist approach of Brubaker. He has defined the national question in the USSR as unintentionally created by Lenin through the used methods for ensuring the loyalty of former empires' peripheries (Brubaker, 1994, p. 53). The Bolsheviks have drawn borders not only for appeasing the emerging national awareness movements during the civil war, which was a direct challenge against centuries years old imperial Russian identity (Shevel, 2011, p. 181) but also to contain and control potential national sentiments in definite territories (Brubaker, 1994, p. 49). Stalin has continued with the same system because collectivization in agriculture necessitated restricted population movements and henceforth checking the borders of titular republics has eased the implementation of the newly introduced passport system (Kessler, 2001, p. 479; Brubaker, 1994, p. 54). So, it would be said that Soviet ethno-territorial republics were born and kept for pragmatic reasons. However, they have caused power allocation at the local level and cemented authority in the hands of local elites. For Brubaker, as we have made parallel assertions before, there was not any kind of nationalism that has reflected in the masses of most of the titular republics. The existing nationalism in the peripheries reflected the vision of local elites (Brubaker, 1994, p. 48), who have used national discourse to emphasize local needs rather than waging aggressive, hostile nationalism against Russians.

With exactly drawn territories, rearranged and systematized local languages and newly constructed alphabets, prioritization, conversion, and adaptation of local customs in modern arts, USSR nation policy has prepared particularly state and social cultures in titular autonomous states. Firstly, localization was supposed to be a useful tool to make socialist propaganda in non-Russian regions of the USSR. Ukraine and Caucasus states have been independent for three years meanwhile unrest against the rule of Moscow was strong in Turkestan. In this sense, not only for creating convenient conditions to make Communist propaganda in local norms but also mitigating independence claims, autonomous republics of the USSR have favored native people in vocational and educational life (Zaslavsky, 1997). Furthermore, in the first years, the Communist Party was divided between those who see Great Russian nationalism as chauvinism and others who consider republic's local nationalism to threat to building socialism (Dziuba, 1974).

2.3.1. National Question in Russia

In this chapter, the development of Russian nationalism is to be discussed regarding its interaction with other national groups in the country. The Soviet state had many obstacles in creating the Soviet nation. In order to exemplify “the nationalities problem” we will provide a brief case study of Crimean Tatars.

2.3.2. Case Study: Crimean Tatars

Crimean Tatars were the descendants of the Golden Horde that had originated from the Great Mongol Empire. Crimean Khanate has lost its power over Muscovite State in parallel with other Tatar khanates. At the end of the 15th century, Crimean went under Ottoman Rule, while the rest of the Khanate has become an Ottoman protectorate. However, unlike other vassal states, the hereditary legacy of the Khanate and its significant auxiliary cavalries for Ottoman military campaigns have ensured a great extent of sovereignty to the Khanate in domestic affairs, and even foreign policy. The Russian conquest of the peninsula at the end of the 19th century has embedded in a new challenge for Russia. Russia did not only acquire strategic ports for military capacity and further commercial ambitions, but also a rooted state and society tradition. To prevent Ottoman takeback of the peninsula and large-scale migration to the Ottoman Empire, Catherine the Great cautiously implemented Russian administration in the peninsula. Nevertheless, as experienced in Finland and Polish autonomous regions, Russia has sought to suppress the native culture of Crimean Tatars by demolishing architecture and favoring Russian culture and language. On the other hand, Russians have continued to be careful in terms of their relations with Crimean nobles. Russians have sought to divide Crimean Tatar elites by assigning salaries to religious clergy equal to their Orthodox counterparts. In the long run, Russians have succeeded coopting Tatar nobles and created voluntary Russification of this class.

The Russian policy towards Crimean Tatars has fluctuated as it was in other non-Russian parts of the Empire. The dominant feature of that policy was distrust of Moscow in terms of the possible rapprochement of Tatars and Ottomans. In 1853 – 56 Crimean War has carried Ottoman brigades at the Crimean cost, but their size was negligible in their alliance with Great Britain and France. Nevertheless, the war and the Tsar’s threat

to the Crimean Tatars with deportation led to the massive resettlement of the Crimean Tatars. Russians already removed them from the shores to the interior parts of the peninsula due to fear that Crimean Tatars would merge with Turkish forces. That kind of distrust was also remarkable after Crimean Tatars have served in many Russian wars under the Russian flag. Therefore, Russian nationalism whereas it did not reach the Russian peasant masses and has developed in a reactionary rather than unitary way, through elite's robust distrust over non-Russian components of the Empire. The Crimean War along with the 1863 Polish Rebellion were decisive to form Russian nationalism in this respect (Tishkov, 2009, p. 4).

The Crimean Tatars migrated to the Ottoman and North Caucasus directions during the Ottoman - Russian wars in the 19th century. As noted, during the Crimean War, the Tatars who were in the coastal regions were resettled inland as Russia deemed them unreliable element. Tatar intellectuals under the intellectual leadership of İsmail Gaspirali at the end of the 19th century came to the conviction that Tatar identity could only survive through the acceptance of more Western and therefore more developed Russian forms (Fisher, 2009). The Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created in 1921.

In the early years of socialist government, the effort to connect the peripheral republics to the central authority resulted in the Russification of the bureaucracy. Stalin's purges, which weeded out opposition and opposing views in the center, spread out to titular republics resulting in the replacement of the eliminated local rulers by sending loyal Slavs from Moscow. In this way, Sovietization in Crimea has spontaneously transformed into Russification (Fisher, 2009). Furthermore, collectivization in agriculture has replaced expelled native *kulaks* (middle farmers) with new Russian settlers. In 1938, the Soviet policy, which led to demographic changes and resulted in Russification, voluntarily or unintentionally, spilled over into the cultural sphere and the Latin alphabet of the Crimea was replaced with the Cyrillic alphabet. Whereas depleting most of their rights has pushed some Crimean Tatars in collaboration with German occupational management, their ratio did not exceed ratio Russian or other ethnicities cooperated with Germans in occupied territories.

While this did not exceed 10 percent for the Crimean Tatars, the Crimean Tatars represented the second largest ethnic group after the Russians among the partisans fighting against the Germans in the occupied peninsula (Finnin, 2022). It is said that the Tatar exile was not carried out for the purpose of ethnic cleansing, but only because of the distrust against Tatars in the possible war with the Turks over the straits following the end of WWII. However, the measures taken during the Crimean war and after the deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944, the attempts to erase the traces of Tatars in the peninsula and to replace them with Russian settlers (Finnin, 2022) reveal that Moscow acted with ethnic hostility. After the war full-blown policy of Russification and the priority/superiority of the Russians spread to the discourses of the communist leaders.

2.4. STATE, NATION, AND NATIONALITIES IN THE COLD WAR ERA

The high economic and military pledges to socialist Eastern Europe and to the Third World and the disparity of outcomes that usually held up with the political career of a single man were symptoms of the imperial overstretch of the USSR which was called an impoverished superpower due to its low life standards (Rowen & Wolf, 1990).

Khrushchev, De-Stalinization and Nationality Policies

Khrushchev's name is identified with de-Stalinization. Extended cultural rights, a relatively higher level of freedom of speech, releasing of political prisoners and closing of gulag concentration camps, and efforts of localization of the economy and attacking on Stalin's personal cult were features of the de-Stalinization.

Khrushchev's secret speech on Stalin has unleashed political forces previously suppressed by Stalin. It is easy to anticipate that after enormous sufferings to achieve communism idea under the supreme leadership of Stalin, the de-Stalinization process has breaded the seeds and made Soviet people ready to hear Gorbachev's attacks on Lenin and his system after three decades. On the other hand, more than shaking the Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact countries saw in de-Stalinization an opportunity to express more freedom from Moscow. One of the first requests from Warsaw Pact countries was the abolishment of mandatory eight-year Russian language classes (Ziegler, 2009). Despite

the radical steps he has taken away from Stalin's ruthless administration, Khrushchev was a follower of Russian messianism. Marxist theorist Karl Kautsky asserted that a potential proletariat revolution in Austria-Hungary Empire would be resulted in Germanization of the Czechs without any compelled policy because of the backwardness of Czech bourgeoisie (Dziuba, 1974). Kautsky's frame seemed to be adopted in Khrushchev's time, despite the fact that Lenin has considered any kind of speech on the backwardness of non-Russian nationalities akin to Russian chauvinism. Khrushchev saw the existence of nations as the greatest hindrance to the building of communism (Fedyshyn, 1967, p. 34).

Each Soviet constitution has perpetuated the place of the Communist Party. Whereas the Constitution of 1977 has restricted the party in terms of constitutionality, the Constitution itself has the Party obliged to guide society confirming article 6. In a constitution that gives a party a leading role, the party program is to be above the Constitution. In this sense, the Party Program of the Communist Party would serve as a fundamental document to understand main Soviet policies including nationality. In this respect, despite the constitution of the Union have not insisted on the Russian nation being distinct from other nationalities, the third program for CPSU which has been prepared during Khrushchev's leadership, referred to the Great Russians as brothers and tutors of other nationalities who "try to leave behind the backwardness of the past" (Low, 1963, pp. 3, 5, 22). For instance, he has argued that Russia brought Central Asian people peace by putting an end to domestic blood and clan wars (Dziuba, 1974). At the twenty-second Party Congress in 1961, Khrushchev proclaimed his policy on nationalities: Soviet nationalities would first experience (*rasvet*) "flourishing" of their ethnic culture, (*sblizhenie*) which would necessarily lead to "drawing together" of these nations until "complete merger" (*sliianie*) was achieved (Suny, 1994, p. 294). This means that Khrushchev, rather than preserving national distinctiveness, backed the elimination of national identities and the creation of solely Soviet identity (Olcott, 1985). This was an indirect confession of the amalgamation of other nations in Great Russians. Khrushchev claimed that the nations would unite to a level that would become a uniform Soviet nation (Fowkes, 2002). The Program has considered the Russian language as the common interaction tool between Soviet men (*Third Program of the CPSU*, 1963), and in fact, the 1961 Communist Party Program codified the promotion of the Russian language which began in 1958 under the policy of fusion of nations (Fedyshyn, 1967, p. 37).

The Soviet Union was founded on the territory of a multinational empire. It was inevitable that the discourses on nationalities would gain importance. On the other hand, the Soviet Union was a socialist state that accepted class rather than ethnic identity as the dominant identity, and intended to make communism overpower the world. Lenin has defined the USSR first and foremost as a working-class dictatorship. Khrushchev has set out to achieve communism within the country in 20 years. He claimed that the class divisions within the country were about to be erased. However, the prohibited/denied existence of class conflict/contradictions has resulted in the nationalization of struggles as the center/periphery conflict as a form of struggle representation, and the nations began to be positioned as the parties to the conflicts. The center was RSFSR, and the periphery has composed of other titular republics.

2.4.1. Brezhnev Doctrine, Detant, Center and Periphery Differentiation

Brezhnev's era was associated with stability and stagnation in domestic affairs, in social and economic areas respectively. Headed by him, the collective leadership of Politburo has become dominant in decision-making processes. Foreign relations of the time, however, were symbolized with Brezhnev Doctrine. Kovalev has formalized the doctrine in 1968 to legalize the Warsaw Pact countries' invasion of Czechoslovakia. In short, Kovalev argued that socialist interests were indivisible and maintained the internationalism that every communist party had dual responsibility composed of their own nation's interests and whole world socialism (Mitchell, 1972). Mitchell also mentioned that in the same year, Brezhnev added the principle of the revolutionary basis of sovereignty into the doctrine. Under these circumstances, it would be ridiculous to expect that such a country might respect its own titular republics' possible secessions even though each Soviet Constitution from the beginning had secured the right of secession.

In terms of assimilation, it is not easy to understand the real nature of Soviet policies by assessing statistical variables. Russification has not been a policy in any period of the USSR. On the other hand, starting with Stalin, it is clear that each leader and party program have attributed the Russian nation, culture, and language as uniting, vanguard and even superiority of it to non-Russian counterparts. At the same time, however, the

practice would differ from leaders' images. Despite asserting to be a reformist, humanitarian, tolerant socialist, Khrushchev often appointed first secretaries of titular republics not from the members of the same titular nation. Khrushchev, without conceding his policy of Russification, was quite tolerant towards dissidents, and even more radical regime opponents, such as Solzhenitsyn. On the contrary, Brezhnev who has been condemned because of his reviving of Stalinist oppression increased the power of first secretaries in republics whom he overwhelmingly appointed from titular nations (Lane, 2002), and thereby, titular nations had achieved overrepresentation in local positions (Fowkes, 2002). Brezhnev has reversed Khrushchev's strategy of constantly replacing party officials (Hyland, 1979, p. 53) and thus he has provided the opportunity for the indigenization of titular republics' party organizations. According to Fowkes, ethnic equalization was the principle of Brezhnev. During the Brezhnev area, except Belarus and Moldavia, all first secretaries of titular republics came from the ranks of the titular nation.

In 1982, the all-Union Conference on The Development of National Relations in Conditions of Advanced Socialism met at Riga. Critics have risen against Brezhnev's attitude towards nationalities concerning the lack of internationalism in it. As described in *Yuri Andropov and the National Question*, Brezhnev's nationality policy consisted of the following:

(i) Defying Khrushchev's position on national identity, Brezhnev held on the position that national identity does not have to be displaced by any upper Soviet identity. Since the new identity has a supranational and at the same time international character, the national commitment would facilitate its creation.

(ii) Official support for flourishing national identities would prevent concealed nationalist and separatist formations.

The Communist Party has designed the USSR as the flagship of world communism for spreading its ideology worldwide and weakening dissidents at the domestic level. The three decades of the Soviet Union has witnessed two world wars, one civil war, and constant extermination and exile of not only politically unsuitable leaders but also the masses who were supposed to follow them. In this case, offering stability to the Soviet people, whose living standards have not reached the level of first-world

countries despite the great price they have paid for a long time might be considered a safe way for the rulers. Detant in foreign affairs, easing tensions with the Western camp was the reflection of domestic stability policy to the external world. Detant was not in contradiction with the interventionist Brezhnev Doctrine because the Doctrine has been formulated in a defensive way and was restricted within the borders of the socialist camp. Localization of party organizations and long tenures at the posts contributed to stabilization. Nevertheless, the stability was incompatible with the USSR and thus the result of localization was not only stretching the gap between the periphery and Russified center (Tishkov, 1995, p. 45) but also economic stagnation. Indigenized and durable titular republic party organizations would consolidate enough power to become reckless towards the centrally planned production goals meanwhile Russian people in the titular republics began to feel discriminated against.

In the Brezhnev era, a point similar to the Khrushchev era was that the use of Belarusian and Ukrainian languages in the field of printed publications and education has drastically decreased in favor of Russian. In this context, the most serious Russification trend has taken place in these two Slavic republics, especially in the urban areas. When it comes to university education throughout the Soviet Union, titular languages have almost disappeared. In Turkic republics, the percentage of printing technical information in the languages of the republics was 20% for Kirghiz and 32% for Azerbaijan (Dziuba, 1974). While the increase in the employment of local government by the local people during the Brezhnev period was a fact, the proportion of Russians in the central institutions of the Union have also increased for an average 10-point (Fowkes, 2002). Moreover, the other seats were mostly filled by Belarusians and Ukrainians. That situation was to cause an inevitably clash of interests between Slavic and other titular republics. Brezhnev has cemented the clash by increasing stabilization with the idea of tenure and job security for party managers. Brezhnev's approach to bureaucracy has led to growing tension between central and local party structures by the 1980s.

2.4.2. Gorbachev Era

Let's summarize how the approach to the USSR has changed in Russian rulers' mind. The USSR has built up on an ideology that resulted in the isolation of the country due to neighbor countries have perceived threat in it for their internal stability. The

isolation means Stalin's rapid industrialization have carried by great sufferings of peasants in terms of transferring capital to industry from agriculture under the condition of foreign debt opportunity was closed for a while. Numerous genocidal hungers in Kazakhstan and in Ukraine (Holodomor) were the direct result of Stalin's policy. The World War II brought even more sufferings for the Soviet people. Additionally, forced labor camps have been maintaining their legacy till 1956. As a result, we could talk about four decades of struggle to create a new system. After 1960s and 1970s were relatively stable in compare with previous 40 years, the eroded economy, corrupt communist party members and bottom-up nationalization of republics have resulted in loss of faith to communism and central government of Moscow respectively in 1980s.

One-year general secretary duties of Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko respectively did not last long enough to make a visible impact. However, thanks to heading KGB for 15 years, Andropov was aware of domestic problems, and seemed to promulgate a reform process after changing seats of many high bureaucrats, and campaigning against corruption. Chernenko, a conservative figure, had few days in office due to his own health issues.

Works related to the Gorbachev era have always begun to be talking about problems of the lagging Soviet Union behind the West in every way. The three elderly general secretaries in the last decade have not paid attention to nationalities problems. (McCauley, 1987) Improving relations with the West due to the arms race has burdened the Soviet budget and lifting of the latter has become the main motivation for mitigating hostilities with the West (Sherr, 1988) which has worsened after the intervention in Afghanistan (Suny, 1993b). Taking measures to enable the inefficient economy to take part in global competition (McCauley, 1987; Nahaylo, 1987), preventing socialist moral collapse from corruption (Lane, 2002), reducing high death rates from widespread excessive alcohol consumption (Ryan, 1995) were problems awaiting Gorbachev. According to him, democratization was the key to the solution to all these problems. Initially, *glasnost* has meant free discussion and self-criticism in a political and social framework that would not shake the hegemony of the Communist Party. In a few years, the idea of speech freedom has transformed into freedom of nations.

When Gorbachev's era came, although the positive transformation of Central Asian republics in the context of industrialization, urbanization, and education in the Soviet Union period was obvious, the inequalities in income distribution between the republics are at the level of 30 percent (Lane, 2002). While the national consciousness of nations has never vanished, *glasnost*, which has gradually delegitimized the Marxist-Leninist ideology, led to the re-emergence of previously suppressed nationalism, ethnic tensions, and eventually demands for independence. Concurrently, the Russification tendency in central administrative bodies has reached a peak point in 1988 that has reflected in the supreme body of the CPSU in which Russians had 84% representation (Lane, 2002). The environment of freedom of thought provided by *glasnost*, while economic inequalities and difficulties affected the entire Soviet country, made it possible for the emerging nationalist groups to remind their subsistence, especially the nations that were most exposed to past assimilation and exile.

In the early days of *glasnost*, the issue of nationalities has not been discussed much, but the exception to this was the discussion of whether the concept of fusion should be included in the program during the preparations of the new party program. It is doubtful that Gorbachev, who set out with the slogan of more socialism was sincere about this. Eventually he, as Russian leaders in tsarist and socialist Russia, put forward the pragmatist policy of keeping large lands together in the USSR. The new Union Treaty, which was tried to be put into effect before the union was dissolved, is a manifestation of this tradition. The Treaty dropped references to socialism and put the principle of human rights in the foreground (Lane, 2002).

Central Asian countries provide important data in the evaluation of the Soviet Union's identity politics. First of all, the highest inclination towards the continuation of the Union was present in these countries. Kazakhstan, for instance, is the last country of the union to declare its independence. Central Asian countries, on the other hand, indirectly provided incentives to Russian nationalists who have opposed the project of diverting the rivers born in Siberia to Central Asia. Secondly, the centre/periphery contradiction was the most acute in most indigenized Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan, along with Russia and Ukraine, was considered one of the key countries of the union. As one of the centers of Khrushchev's ambitious agricultural policies, an important space research area, and rich with underground resources, Kazakhstan was also noteworthy for the first ethnic

revolt of the Gorbachev era. The December Uprising (*Zheltoksan*) which took place in the capital of Kazakhstan, Almaty, was the student protests against Moscow's domination. One of the reasons for these actions was the replacement of Kazakh-origin Din Muhammed Kunayev, who had been in the position of governing Kazakhstan for 25 years, with Russian-origin Gennadi Kolbin. While a relatively low number of people were persecuted, the events represented one of the turning points in the development of civil society as well as the resurgence of nationalism. Whereas the Communist Party Central Committee has recognized the events as the expression of Kazakh nationalism and declared them enemies of socialism, the Kazakhs, whose opinions were consulted, said that Kolbin, who was appointed as the first secretary, caused a reaction not because of his ethnic origin, but because he came from another republic, that is, he lacked knowledge and expertise of Kazakhstan's problems (Helsinki Watch Organization : U.S.), 1990). In this case, Moscow's arbitrary decisions have become a fact in the eyes of titular republics. Meanwhile, Memorial, a non-governmental organization founded during the Gorbachev era claimed that the events stemmed from the internal conflicts of the Kazakhstan Communist Party, and intra-party factions have manipulated the protesting students (ibid). The memorial was the most powerful of the non-governmental organizations established during the Gorbachev era and devoted itself to revealing the crimes committed during the Stalin era. In this context, once the issue was about a titular republic, Memorial's stance that supported the centralist/official view of the USSR was remarkable and has shown that newly emerged civil society was also ethnically differentiated.

Gorbachev has not intervened in dissident movements across Eastern Europe and in 1989, the socialist bloc in Europe vanished except for the USSR. The USSR itself permitted multi-candidate free elections (Kiernan & Aistrup, 1991, p. 1049) while still being dominated by single-party rule.

Gorbachev's ideological inconsistency reflected the flexible policy tradition of the Russian statesmen he was a successor of. The reason for the flexibility was the aspiration to keep the Soviet Union as a whole. However, when everything started to spiral out of control, Gorbachev's steps towards centralization ignoring the ongoing indigenization of republics in the last decades as well as his reimposition of the building communism agenda in the country have alienated the masses of people who have long ago lost their belief in communism. As a result, heavily criticizing the earlier years of socialism while

attempting to centralize the union in the name of socialism, Gorbachev created a dilemma in the perceptions of Soviet citizens. People's will to move away from Moscow has increased, which seems to be moving towards re-centralization.

Beissinger asserted that the rise of nationalism which found opportunity owing to Glasnost policies is the main cause for the fragmentation of the USSR. The degree of unleashed nationalism across the country could not exhaust the causes of the main dissolution of the largest country in the world. Rather, nationalism has become the most pre-eminent, and legal platform for presenting problems to the authorities. Nationalism could only be considered as a crucial explanatory factor in the Baltic Soviet republics and Eastern Europe's desire to get out of Soviet influence. Eastern Europe and especially Baltic republics have been resentful of their impelled incorporation into the Eastern Bloc (Beissinger, 2009, p. 332).

2.4.3. Russian Nationalism in the Last Decade of the USSR

The dissolution of the USSR was relatively peaceful bearing in mind the multiethnic structure and size of the union (Beissinger, 1993). Some challenged the idea that non-Slav republics suffered Moscow's exploitation, to the opposite, they complained that huge transfer payments have pushed their welfare ahead of RSFSR. The fact that Moscow has constructed state structures in national republics that were ready to operate independently fed nationalism among the Russian population, who felt deprived at the expense of the continuation of non-Russians' loyalty to the Union. This has triggered the emergence of detached national identity among Russians and thereby Russian support for further secessionist movements across the USSR (Zaslavsky, 1997). Environmental concerns about ambitious projects that aimed to revert Russian rivers into Central Asia to feed corps have also raised Russian nationalism and have given its new character as not historically messianic type but isolationist (Golden, 1982). On the other hand, the Soviet command economy was directed from Moscow and dictated Russia-centered investments in other republics. Western republics have manufactured raw materials from Central Asia. Zaslavsky has summarized that kind of relationship as welfare colonialism. Rigidly defined national boundaries and informal division of labor among nationalities led to disputes characterized with national identity rather than class.

2.5. YELTSIN AND OBSTACLES TO CREATING NEW RUSSIAN IDENTITY

The economic difficulties that Boris Yeltsin faced when he took office, which he could not prevent from worsening throughout his presidency, increased the importance of giving the Russians a new identity around which they could unite. It was a serious challenge for Yeltsin to isolate the Russian identity from the Soviet past, which he was ideologically hostile to. The Russian identity has become identical to the USSR, the last of the multi-ethnic Russian state systems, which tends to constantly expand in terms of territoriality and spread ideologically for centuries. Thus, seeking to achieve a sharp break from the past, by saying "*take as much sovereignty as you can swallow*"², Yeltsin initially preferred real federalism in contrast to Soviet centralism. On the other hand, there is no consensus on Yeltsin's nationality policy. There is no consensus on the reasons for the broad rights granted to autonomous republics in Russian Federation. Having been the visible face of the forces resisting the 1991 August Coup increased Yeltsin's popularity. However, this situation has also pointed to the difficulty of the conditions in which he came to power. He needed the support of everyone he could reach. Alliances with titular elites were a strategy in this sense (Petrov & Nazrullaeva, 2018). Thus, taking steps to increase the quality of democracy by localizing representation as much as possible was not in fact an indicator of his commitment to democracy. After all, it took only two years for Yeltsin to evolve from the leader of the anti-coup forces to the leader who gave the order to smash the parliament. In addition, these two years resulted in the eroding of the broad rights granted to the federated republics. The 1993 Constitution that enacted in the last days of the year was a back step for the status and rights of titular entities in Russia by not defining them as national states (Tishkov, 1995, p. 47). The most striking example of depleted federal rights was Tatarstan. The rights granted to this state have had the potential to become one of the symbols of democratic Russia, both as rights granted to an autonomous structure with Muslim identity at the forefront, and by proving that Russia's hatred for the Tatar domination of ancient centuries had subsided.

Pursuant to Sergei Stankevich, one of the Kremlin advisers, this period was the phase of Russia, which did not even have an army yet, redefining itself as an independent state. Stankevich believed that the relations established especially in foreign policy would

² <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/21/world/tatar-area-in-russia-votes-on-sovereignty-today.html>

play an important role in the redefinition of Russia (Stankevich, 1992). This point confirmed Yeltsin's statement that Russia's interests were in the former Soviet countries, especially in terms of defending the rights of the Russians remaining in the surrounding countries. It is understood from Yeltsin's statements that he attached great importance to the federation agreement on which the Russian Federation was founded. He thought that Russia might enter a new spiral of dissolution after the USSR, and therefore the agreement was a guarantee to prevent this. He saw the agreement as the assurance of Russia's historical continuity (Hiatt, 1992) and unity (Derrick, 2008). Thus, it can be said that Russia's foreign policy was that of the external national homeland to the diaspora community - *Rossiane* in the model put forward by Brubaker in which he has argued that Russia is building a new Russian identity based on ostensibly Russian territories (Brubaker, 2009, p. 16). Diaspora means a nation that lives beyond the homeland of the nation and transborder nationalism seeks to secure and monitor the rights of the nation outside the home (Brubaker, 1996). The Primakov Doctrine in this way has insisted Russia's primacy in the post-Soviet world as near abroad and rejected the unipolar world on behalf of the multipolar world in which Russia would be one of the main actors (Service, 2020, pp. 155 - 156).

Struggles with Tatars and war with Chechens can be metaphorically described as Russia's return to the pre-socialist period. These have been manifestations of the failure of the project of creating the brotherhood of the Soviet people. Russia became independent by breaking the Tatar domination. In addition, Chechnya is the region that the Tsardom had the most difficulty in incorporating into the Empire, among the lands that were included in the tsarist borders in the past and are now within the Russian Federation. Therefore, it was expected that Tatarstan and Chechnya would be the two states with the highest demands for autonomy/independence among 31 autonomous regions within the Russian Federation. In this way, they were the only two states that refrained to sign the Federation Treaty in 1992 (Pokalova, 2015, p. 21). Moscow refused to recognize the sovereign rights of Chechnya, which declared its sovereignty in 1990. On the other hand, the Tatarstan case as to be explained below is characterizing the pragmatic imperial approach of Russia towards non-Russians during the RF, meanwhile the case of Crimean Tatars was about Soviet nationality policies and represents the same approach.

2.5.1. Case Study: Tatarstan

Tatarstan has a special place among autonomous republics and regions of the Russian Federation. At first, Tatarstan was the first non-Russian region that was incorporated into Moscow State in mid 16th century. Secondly, before annexation, Tatarstan have a long history descending from Volga Bulgars who lived between the 7-13th centuries. So, Tatars have seen the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a chance to emphasize their historical legacy as being an ancient nation. In 1991, there were two scenarios Tatar politicians would want to follow. The first one was full independence. In short, it could be said that the independence desire of Tatarstan was limited by the fear of the Russian Federation because an independent Tatarstan would become an enclave surrounded by it. So, its independence could only be on paper. The second scenario was sovereignty. In popular use, the term sovereign state was used to explain a political organization that controlled the full exercise of executive, legislative and judicial powers which could only be restricted by international law. On the other hand, sovereignty in the years of dismay of the USSR has gained a different meaning. What was a sovereign state mean in this concept? In Montevideo Convention, besides territory, population and authority; recognition that means establishing foreign relations were the definitive components of sovereignty (Biersteker & Weber, 1996; Derrick, 2008). The literature on USSR and Russia has not given any definition of this term. Hence, the term could only be defined through interrogating to what extent the owners of sovereignty declarations have committed to autonomy or independence. Declaration of sovereignty meant a relocation of the republics in the USSR. For instance, it was the Russian Republic itself that has announced itself as a sovereign state in the summer 1990 one and half a year before the collapse of the USSR. Initially, Tatarstan, with its deep-rooted history and significant population, was considering the right of owning a titular republic as the highest tier of regional functioning of autonomy in the Soviet Union (Derrick, 2008). In this case, it could be argued that most of the political actors within the USSR have estimated that the Union will survive under a different kind of political regime or newly emerged federation or at least in a confederation.

Tatarstan wanted to become a founding member of the Commonwealth of Independent States. This was a demand that would put it on an equal footing with the former Soviet republics. That demand would lead Tatarstan to demand independence in

the future following titular republics of the Soviet Union but has not been able to be attained. The Constitution of Tatarstan, adopted in November 1992, considered Tatarstan as a sovereign state associated with the Russian Federation accompanied by popular referendum and a subject of international law (Rorlich, 1999, p. 381; Slocum, 1999, p. 51). Meanwhile, Yeltsin was in a weak position due to his struggle with parliament throughout 1993. For this reason, the Tatarstan issue could be dealt with in February 1994, when Yeltsin now consolidated his authority. The treaty mentioned Tatarstan not an associated state but a state united with the Russian Federation (Graney, 2001). On the other hand, the treaty stated that the relations between Russia and Tatarstan will be developed on the basis of bilateral agreements. Therefore, the treaty has given some degree of sovereignty to Tatarstan meanwhile stressing on the term union under Russian Federation. Tatarstan avoided signing the Federation Treaty in March 1992 which allowed autonomous republics to make contacts with foreign states but not treaties (Slocum, 1999). However, it finally had to accept the Treaty in 1994. Tatarstan had industrial facilities, many of which were engaged in high-tech production. Furthermore, oil production was enough to subsidize other less profitable sectors such as agriculture. Nevertheless, Tatarstan, deprived of refineries, had to send its oil to Moscow refineries (Slocum, 1999, p. 61), thus this has made Tatarstan depend on Russian Federation. (Graney, 2001; Derrick, 2008).

One of the Putin's first objective was limiting exercising sovereignty of autonomous republics. In June 2000, Russian Federation Constitutional Court has assisted Putin's nationality policy by recognizing Tatarstan's claim to be a sovereign state as null and void (Graney, 2001, p. 32). 1994 Treaty with Tatarstan legalized the status of the country as a sovereign state as reported by the concurrent Tatarstani President Mintimer Shaimiev. However, the ambiguity of it has eased Putin's hand once he decided to take back what Boris Yeltsin government has given (Derrick, 2008). The Establishment of Regional Political Institutions Law has made obligatory all bilateral treaties within the republics of Russian Federation to be complying with Russian federal codification (Graney, 2001, p. 36).

2.5.2. Case Study: Chechen War

The Chechnya War was completely associated with Yeltsin not only because he was head of state, but also there was no parliamentary/committee decision on the use of armed force. Before that, however, Yeltsin's rhetoric was contradictory. While Yeltsin in August 1994 said that an armed intervention in Chechnya could result in an uprising of the entire Caucasus (Evangelista, 2002), in his speech at the United Nations in September 1994, Yeltsin stated that Russia's primary interests were in the former Soviet countries. He also stated that securing the rights of Russians living in neighboring countries is the obligation of the Russian Federation (Goshko, 1994). It was not an unexpected affair that Moscow, which gave a semi-codified frame to its foreign interventions by announcing the Brezhnev Doctrine during the Soviet era, would not let any autonomous republic's demand for independence, even though it was constitutionally guaranteed. When we think that Yeltsin said that Russia's interests in its former republics continued, the new Moscow government could not be expected to allow Chechnya's independence.

The dissolution of the USSR has been relatively peaceful in comparison with other multinational empires in history, or concurrent multinational socialist Yugoslavia's brutal dispersal, except for the clashes in Nagorno Karabakh. After three decades, it seems ethnic problems in former Soviet republics were only postponed. The first case consisting of armed clashes is Chechen War. Between 1992 and 1994, the legislative and judicial organs in Chechnya and President Dudayev were in a power struggle on the issue of independence. On the other hand, Yeltsin was preparing for war by issuing decrees regulating the conditions for military intervention to prevent the Duma's recommendations which were in favor to resolve the issue through negotiations (Pokalova, 2015, p. 26). Thus, the war has become heavily associated with Yeltsin, and the Russian armies' inability to cope with the nonconventional war in which an easy victory was foreseen, resulted in a decline of the Russian public's trust in Yeltsin to 13 percent. Increasing opposition to the war in Russia has compelled Yeltsin to make peace with the Chechens (ibid).

CHAPTER 3 – PUTIN’S RISE TO POLITICAL POWER AND HIS INTELLECTUAL SOURCES

3.1. PUTIN’S RISE TO POWER AND POLITICAL VIEWS

Putin and his close media present him as humble, having respect in Orthodoxy, a rare drinker, mindful, and strong (Service, 2020). The income gap has become so wide in the 1990s, and by emphasizing on his ordinary family roots, Putin has sought to be close to most Russians. He showed respect to Orthodoxy while being hesitant to criticize Soviet period because some of his close political allies equalized anti-Sovietism and Russophobia (Russell, 2014). Alcoholism was a problem since the late years of the Soviet Union and remaining distant from alcohol consumption made him a representation of the ideal man for Russian woman who has frequent problems with heavy drinker husbands. Bearing in mind his popularity in the eyes of Russian women, Putin has only enjoyed drinks at the official ceremonies with small sips (Foy, 2019; Service, 2020). In TV shows he got engaged critics about local administration or businesses and quickly solved these problems on spot in minutes which served for positive public relations for him.

Communist Party was the supervisor of all government agencies in the USSR. The breakup of the USSR and the banning of CPSU has left the Russian Federation deprived of such an institution. To deal with various power centers, from oligarchs to local governments and elites, Yeltsin depended on the FSB, which has kept its unity and tradition sourced from the former KGB. FSB, not only has become a field of recruitment for many essential government posts but also its particular education has preached to the FSB personnel that they are indispensable for Russia's future (Service, 2020, p. 171) The tradition of bringing former members of the secret service to important civil posts in Russia did not begin with Putin. Yeltsin, who came to power in a catastrophic environment, has appointed many officials with KGB and subsequently FSB backgrounds. Oddly enough for Putin himself, the St. Petersburg mayor Anatoli Sobchak,

his former law lecturer, has called Putin into his team (“The Day Putin Cried,” 2018). During Sobchak’s office, Putin has become deputy major (Gustafson, 2012, p. 235). In the summer of 1996, Sobchak failed to get reelected. He was recommended to Yeltsin and was appointed as the deputy head of the Presidential Property Management Department. After additional experience in controlling the presidency budget and a job related to the regional administration, Putin has become the director of the FSB. According to Wood, Putin's handling style of domestic protests has taken its shape in his days as a KGB agent in Dresden. He has witnessed how mass protests could topple regimes (Wood, 2018, p. 3).

After Sobchack could not get reelected in St. Petersburg, Putin began to work in Moscow, where he gained a reputation with his loyalty to Yeltsin. In his later political career, loyalty has been an important issue for Yeltsin. For instance, it is an unwritten rule that anyone leaving Putin’s close circle would not write about his memories. So, his loyalty has made Putin the director of the FSB appointed by Yeltsin over more experienced hundreds of candidates (Gustafson, 2012, p. 235). He was the last prime minister of Yeltsin who tended to change them frequently. However, his last resort was Putin whom he also announced as his heir in August 1999 (*Yeltsin Redraws Political Map*, 1999).

Putin has actually become the legitimate leader of Russia in the eyes of the public only when the Second Chechen War ended in favor of Russia. Public support, which was 31 percent in August 1999, increased to 80 percent in 3 months (Wood, 2018). Putin has come to the presidency after Yeltsin’s surprise resignation. When taking into account Yeltsin’s deteriorated health, alcohol addiction, and being the face of ineffective foreign policy and economic collapse, the widespread support for Putin was not a miracle. On the other hand, in the opinion of Wood, Putinism is not a rejection of Yeltsinism but a maturation of it. Yeltsin has emerged as a radical defender of democracy in 1991 against the August Coup. Nevertheless in October 1993, he ended the dispute with the parliament by having ordered to shell it with tanks, and then increased the powers of the presidency (Wood, 2018, p. 50). Wood has considered the First Chechen War from this perspective too. Despite Yeltsin himself supported the large-scale autonomy of regions at the beginning, he was the one who intervened in the region which declared sovereignty

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, son of Akhmat Kadyrov who fought in the Second Chechen War on the side of the Russian Federation became the president of the republic in 2004. Moscow has given Kadyrov unchecked control over the Republic with abundant financial subsidies in return for keeping stability in the war-torn region with a heavy hand (Petrov & Nazrullaeva, 2018, pp. 285 – 287). Putin has sought to pacify Chechen resistance by promoting a strongman who was given full authority in Chechnya in exchange for full loyalty to Moscow (Service, 2020, p. 633).

The first ten years of the Putin era witnessed the transformation of Russia into a state and society resembling Western countries from enrollment to high education to technology use in work and private life, and from doubling of GDP per capita to a sharp increase in visiting foreign countries. More importantly, a much more responsible state has compensated for governmental failures by court decisions and solely paid \$220 million in 2010, seventy times bigger than 2001 (Treisman, 2018, p. 26). There were important political reforms akin to the 1906 - 1914 Duma Period. Further expectation arose concerning the development of civil society and real competition in the political sphere. In the first decade of the 2000s, Putin had more support from pro-Westerners than anti-Westerners (Treisman, 2018, p. 23), and Russia was on the idea of being a European country (Laqueur, 2015, p. 55). The Russian point of view, which accepted the ideological superiority of the West, has persisted in Yeltsin's and Putin's early days, was most clearly put forward by Tishkov. The West, which has a long history of nation-state building and administration, should assist Russia in determining the principles and laws on which the new Russian nation-state will be built (Tishkov, 1995, p. 53).

The 1990s witnessed the fallen glory of Russia. Due to this fact, Russia was suffering from post-imperial and post-superpower syndrome (Kasamara & Sorokina, 2012; Service, 2020; Garbuzov; 2022). Russia has found its great state in the lands captured by the great sacrifices of the Russian people in Eastern Europe. While the loss of Eastern Europe meant the loss of great-state status in Russian public opinion (Zlobin, 1996, p. 74), the entry of these regions into American hegemony, shall push Putin as a politician who cares about public support and is historically obsessed with Ukraine (Kuzio, 2022, pp. 40 - 41) to take action. The Western aerial bombing campaign against Bosnian Serb militias became one of the indicators of how Russia has lost its status. Yeltsin under public pressure reminded Russian objections over the military

intervention against Yugoslavia without any result. (Plokhi, 2017; Dunlop, 1996, p. 30). As a leader of a bankrupt economy (Schmemmann, 1991; Chiodo & Owyang, 2002), leading a political union that is shaped by the withdrawal of the USSR from each struggle point with the West (Wintour, 2022; Timmermann, 2007), Yeltsin had to earn Western support. However, his order of the 1993 Parliament Bombing (Steele & Hearst, 1993; Kirilenko, 2013; Shapiro & Hiatt, 1993), the anti-democratic policies in the 1996 Elections (Kramer, 1996; Shimer, 2020), and for his war in Chechnia weakened his democratic image in the West.

As maintained by Soldatov, the turning points for Vladimir Putin were at first the 2011 Arab Spring and secondly, mass protests held in major Russian cities after parliamentary and presidential elections in 2011 and 2012. As a close working friend from Putin's St. Petersburg days, Medvedev has been incumbent Russian President between 2008 and 2012 during the tenure of Putin named as the prime minister because the previous form of the Russian Constitution shall not permit more than two terms of presidency. Both Medvedev and Putin have displayed similar strategies to the protests that emerged in Russia in 2011 when the Arab Spring protests were taking place in the Middle East and North Africa. President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin of the time respectively expressed that Russia sees what is happening in the Middle East as a Western scenario. While they positioned Russia in the anti-Western camp, claiming that Russia was the next target, they admitted the fragility of the Russian system by considering Russia as open to Western intervention as the Middle Eastern states which have weak state traditions (Soldatov & Schulmann, 2018; Elder, 2011b; Elder, 2011a). In this regard, it can be questioned why Soldatov and Treisman took the year 2012, not the 2008 Georgian War, as the breaking point. After all, Saakashvili was a leader who came to power with the pro-western Orange Revolution. It may come to mind that Russia considers the issue of Georgia as a small, local case, given the size of Georgia. However, even on a small scale, this is Russia's first cross-border military operation since the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the dominant perception of 2011-2012 domestic and foreign protests was as such: Russia's conciliatory attitude with the West, which started with Gorbachev in the last years of the USSR, has continued in Yeltsin's period, with some reservations such as differences of opinion on the Yugoslav War. It seems that Putin also continued the conciliatory policy in his first term. He especially

gained the admiration of President Bush (Beall, 2014; VOA, 2009). Russia has not presented any opposition to the American use of military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to topple the Taliban in the Afghanistan War following 9 September 2001. Thus, Soldatov may see the Georgian War as a short pause, not an interruption of pacifist policy, just as Yeltsin showed with the bombing of Belgrade. Also, between the Georgian War and 2012, there is the Medvedev era, who was the West's preferred colleague to Putin.

In 2012, with the start of Putin's third presidency, the tension between Russia and the West followed a constantly escalating trend. Before, color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia between 2003 - 2005 and United States' plan to deploy anti-missile systems in Eastern Europe had changed Putin's Western perspective in a negative way (Service, 2020). One of the most important indicators that the *siloviki* no longer thinks as a united mind (Gustafson, 2012, p. 236) was how Medvedev reacted against NATO intervention in the Libyan civil war. The reflection of the Soviet Politburo on the Russian Federation has been *siloviki* power structures (Gustafson, 2012, p. 233) that has gradually lost its influence after 2008 (Treisman, 2018), and fed with personal networks Putin has developed in St. Petersburg times. During NATO's intervention in Libya, Medvedev's statements questioning Gaddafi's legitimacy have been found contradictory in Russia while they were welcomed in the West. While his own president was not opposed to the operation, Russia's ambassador to Tripoli continued to issue reports that misjudged the operation (Service, 2020, p. 84). At the same time, Putin condemned the Libyan intervention as illegitimate finding it akin to Iraq's invasion by the US (Putin, 2011).

3.2. PUTIN'S CONSOLIDATION OF POWER AND HIS DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

In the USSR, the general secretary of the Communist Party was the dominant figure in the Politburo. On the other hand, after the Stalin era, the Politburo has included many influential political powerhouses commanding different bureaucratic organizations (Treisman, 2018). The USSR was a highly militarized country, and it had extensive

security and intelligence services. In the USSR, the Communist Party has supervised these services (Soldatov & Schulmann, 2018). In the Russian Federation, Yeltsin encouraged inner circle struggles within security agencies to control them (Soldatov & Schulmann, 2018). In contrast to Yeltsin, Putin has given importance to the security organizations to act as a united whole again. He abolished semi-independent law enforcement agencies such as the Tax Police and the Communication Agency established during the Yeltsin era. Prime Minister Dimitry Medvedev, Justice and Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin and Nikolai Patrushev, Head of the FSB were some important figures who belonged to Putin's personal networks that have developed during St. Petersburg city administration (Wood, 2018, p. 35). The *siloviki* today represents divided and rival agencies and also composes various personal networks whose main motivation was accessing resources after accessing the Commander in Chief, Vladimir Putin (Gustafson, 2012, p. 236; Soldatov & Schulmann, 2018). Whereas the former Communist Party was a cohesive ruling party, *siloviki* has lost its cohesive clan feature and thus its new shape has strengthened Putin's role as a referee. According to Treisman, Putin's style of governance depended on autopilot and manual control. The competitive central and regional government agencies, elites, and powerful individuals (oligarchs) provided a system for Putin in which no one would concentrate power enough to become a potential rival to Putin. That kind of government does not need Putin to intervene and called as autopilot. However, once deadlock emerges, Putin himself takes control, which is called manual control. Manual control is implemented in key decisions that usually include ideas and behaviors of informal agents outside the formal government cycles (ibid). Reminding the reign of Peter the Great and Alexander I, Putin argued that successful times for Russians coincided with strong leaders (Rice, 2017).

When Putin took office, he argued that the strategic sectors should be under the control of the state. With Yeltsin, the Russian constitution gives the president control over the economy to an unprecedented extent in the world until that day (Zlobin, 1996, p. 72). Putin has used that power in a reverse direction that Yeltsin did. By 2004, companies run by Putin's appointments accounted for 40% of Russia's GDP (Wood, 2018). These companies include Yukos, owned by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was at odds with the government. In 2002, Khodorkovsky was the richest man of Russia. As specified by Gustafson, akin to many oligarchs, Khodorkovsky has developed political ambitions. In

July 2000, Putin displayed his dissatisfaction with the power of oligarchs and said that oligarchs should be kept out of politics (Sakwa, 2009, p. 78). Since private capital accumulation was insufficient in the USSR to afford the acquisition of massive plants, close relations have played a vital role for emerging new wealthy class, called oligarchs in Russian Federation and also other former Soviet Republics except for the Baltic states. In Russia, politics belonged to a narrow-privileged group that included oligarchs. As the Duma Chairman Boris Gryzlov stated that the parliament (Duma) was not a platform for political struggles (Wood, 2018, p. 66), Khodorkovsky was arrested in October 2003 with the accusation of violating trust laws and was released in 2013.

Oil-related revenues have been responsible for the accumulation of wealth for the oligarchs meanwhile had a crucial role in funding state expenditures since the 1970s. For Wood, one of the most distinctive features of the Putin governments from Yeltsin times is the economy. Yeltsin has disembarked command the economy with rapid privatization scheme of shock therapy. The privatization of the Russian oil industry has reached its peak point in 2002 when private ownership was about 80%. That ratio has declined to 58% in 2006 under Putin (Gustafson, 2012, p. 101).

For Soldatov, the *siloviki* favor a strong and highly centralized state, supported by large well-financed security and defense structures. They think Russia's status as a world power and its natural sources was in danger from NATO and the United States. Under these circumstances, the *siloviki* has distinguished themselves from ordinary people in a belief that only they could understand Russia's problems and defend her against external threats. Nevertheless, Russian intelligence - the *siloviki* rather- was not successful to forecast the crisis in Ukraine in late 2013 (Soldatov & Schulmann, 2018). At this point, whereas Putin has continued to have confidence in *siloviki*, he began to make decisions alone or only consulting with narrower aids, top *siloviki* (Soldatov & Schulmann, 2018). For instance, as the later intervention in the Syrian Civil War happened in the same scheme, Putin has admitted that he made the decision to annexation of Crimea personally (Plokhi, 2017).

Putin has centralized the state. On the other hand, the elimination of the actual federation was highly dependent on the fluctuations in oil prices. As the main fund of the government, lower oil prices have created pressure on Moscow's centralist tendency

(Petrov & Nazrullaeva, 2018). According to Petrov, centralism of Putin has surfaced in four steps:

- 1 - Putin's Party-United Russia: Most of the regional governors have become members of the Party.
- 2 - Fiscal reforms of the early 2000s have abolished a lot of taxes previously authorized to local governments and thus local budgets have become much more dependent on federal transfers (Petrov & Nazrullaeva, 2018).
- 3 - Elections for governors were terminated and they were appointed by the President (Petrov & Nazrullaeva, 2018) and only required local parliament's approval (*Regnum*, 2007).
- 4 - After the 2011 popular unrest, gubernatorial elections were reenacted in 2012 (Teague, 2014), but then the frequency of governors being fired by Putin rapidly increased (Petrov & Nazrullaeva, 2018).

Stated by Service, Putin has been considering customs and traditions as inevitable. Their desertion will devastate the country and conscious of that fact, Russians have devoted themselves to keeping their traditional approach in each tsarist and socialist system. Again, akin to tsarist Russia's nationalism, Putin is cautious to implement a type of Russian nationalism that is far from insisting on racial purity due to avoid offending other nationalities (Service, 2020, p. 63). For Putin, the USSR experiment has drawn artificial borders which exploded as a time bomb (Press, 2016) and made Russian people the biggest divided people in the world (*Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club*, 2015).

Intersection of National Sorrow and International Affairs

Near abroad is a term in use to distinguish other foreign countries and new foreign countries as former Soviet republics (Service, 2020). Primakov introduced the term during Yeltsin's presidency and Putin has built up his foreign policy on it by asserting to be the guarantor of Russian speakers abroad. During the accession of Baltic states to the NATO, Russia has acknowledged that it could not prevent the process unless it would threaten them with real war (Babayan, 2015). Beyond geostrategic concerns, Russian

Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev has argued that the US aimed to weaken Russia for exploiting Russia's rich natural resources (*Patrushev Exclusive Interview*, 2016). One of Putin's close aid on economy Sergei Glazev has asserted that the US has converted Ukraine into a trench against Russia (Service, 2020, p. 138). When Putin was asked about whether Russia has made mistakes in his foreign policy, Putin said that they should not have trusted the West that much (*Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club*, 2015).

Putin's View of Russia's Recent History

In his narratives, Putin follows two methods when he approaches Russia's past critically:

1- Before examining the policies that have persisted in the past, Putin prefers to highlight the reasons that push the Russian leaders to these policies. For example, instead of describing the Yeltsin and Gorbachev eras as one of the worst times for Russia, during which Russia lost her superpower status and became impoverished, Putin said that Gorbachev had put an end to the system that had become intolerable to the Russian people. Whereas Yeltsin's presidency has been alleged with corruption and unfair privatizations that led to the emergence of oligarchs, he states Yeltsin gave freedom to the Russian people above all else (Interview with Time Magazine, 2007). Putin's replacement of the new Russian anthem of the Yeltsin era with former USSR rhythm with new lyrics is a metaphor that represents that Putin seeks to merge Russian history into a single pot, emphasizing endurance for the nation and Russia's achievements that leads all humankind.

2- When he criticizes on the past of his country, he does not complete this criticism without making comparisons with other countries. This method is generally classified as "whataboutism" in the literature. For example, while condemning the Soviet Union's imposition of socialism on Eastern Europe by force, he states that today's US interventions repeat the mistakes of the Russians in the past (Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, 2015).

The 2008 Russo – Georgian War and the 2020 Constitutional Referendum are the two substantial events that Putin's hegemony over Russian politics has demonstrated:

3.2.1. 2008 Russo - Georgian War

The Georgia War represents a different situation for Russian politics in compare with other milestones of 2000s. In the period between 2008 and 2012, that includes the Georgian War of August 2008, due to concurrent Russian Constitution has not permitted third consecutive presidency for the same person, Prime Minister Dimitry Medvedev and President Putin has exchanged their positions smoothly. There were many allegations about Medvedev's closeness to liberals and Western values³. His later career in relatively less important positions seems to conclude a kind of tension between two politicians. On the other hand, during Georgian War, Medvedev was incumbent president and he, in opposition with Putin's narrative, asserted that he was the authority made the decision alone⁴. However, as stated by Putin, he informed leading figures including the President and thus the decision was a result of collective brainstorm⁵.

The war lasted for 4 days and resulted in de-facto independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Whereas the main argument of Russia about offensive was saving lives of Russian people in there, it is known that Russia does not approach kindly the NATO bids came from its part of "Near Abroad", from Georgia.

3.2.2. Intervention to Syrian Civil War

Intervention in the Syrian civil war in 2015 followed the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russia has supported the Syria on behalf of Assad government through aerial bombings against the ISIS and Free Syria Army a group that was supported by the West at the initial steps of the war. When American Secretary of State John Kerry interrogated Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the intelligence of Russian intervention in Syria, Lavrov has rejected the existence of Russian troops in Syria (Kerry, 2018). That kind of refusal shall not give time to Russians. Rather, it shows Putin has decided and ordered alone, even having not informed his foreign affairs minister of such a strategic decision.

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/13/russia.georgia>

⁴ <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/0810/Was-Putin-in-charge-during-Georgia-war-Medvedev-begs-to-differ>

⁵ <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/08/08/putin-contradicts-medvedev-on-georgia-war-a16890>

The aim of the intervention for Putin was not only to secure the Syrian regime as a sole Arab ally of Russia after toppled Gaddafi by NATO but also to present itself as the champion of international law by relieving the Syrian regime under the pressure of various foreign involvements (Plakoudas, 2015, pp. 34-35) and acting as peacekeeper against Western aggression (Engström, 2014, p. 373). In addition, intervening in Syria is a revenge against the West for Russia (Götz & Merlen, 2019). Russia seeks to compensate the influence and power it lost to the West under the leadership of the USA at the end of the Cold War in Eastern Europe by filling the gap in the Middle East arising from the American withdrawal.

3.2.2. 2020 Constitutional Amendments and Referendum

57% of the constituents have supported the amendments of the Constitution of Russian Federation. The changes covered various aspects from welfare spendings to election terms of the president. In regard with this study, it seems not only a bundle of legal codes but also a historical documentary on which scale Putin has extended his power up to be influential on legislators to create personalized parts of constitution. Beyond increased terms and power of the Russian president, the amendments lists of the prioritization of Russian language, and references to indivisible Russian history with its religion Orthodoxy.

Article 81 - 3.1 The provision of the section 3 of article 81 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation limiting the number of terms for which the same person cannot hold the office of the President of the Russian Federation, is applied to the person having held or holding the post of the President of the Russian Federation without taking into account the number of terms the he (she) had held or is holding this post by the time of coming into force of the amendment to the Constitution of the Russian Federation introducing the relevant limitation, and does not exclude for him (her) the possibility to hold the post of the President of the Russian Federation: during the terms allowed by this provision.

Part of the amendment dedicated to the drawing the limitation for terms of presidents. This part has excluded the previous and concurrent terms the incumbent

president during the enactment of the law. Therefore, the amendments allow V. Putin to be elected for more two consequent terms for six years to each term. This part of the amendment has made the constitution as a paper invoking the principle of equality before the law rather it has created a constitution on the behalf of a single person, V. Putin. The upper legislative organ of Russia, the Federation Council lists their tasks as “*to hold consultations on candidates, as proposed by the President of the Russian Federation, to head federal executive agencies (including federal ministries) in charge of defense, national security, internal affairs, justice, foreign affairs, preventing emergencies, disaster relief, and public safety;*”

In accordance with the Constitutional amendments, the State Duma is vested with the right to approve the appointees of the President for ministries. On the other hand, the amendments shall strengthen the upper legislative organ, the Federal Council (European Parliament, 2020). The chosen ministers in regard with national security, defense, and law enforcement is to be subject to ratification of the upper legislative organ, the Federation Council. The Federation Council’s members up to 10 percent of its composition are directly appointed by the president of the Russian Federation. Rest of the membership is composing 1 legislative and 1 executive branch representatives of local governments. Bearing in mind that the head of the executive braces are appointed by Putin, the Federation Council's loyalty to the President is out of question. As a result, the responsibility on election and appointment of leading figures of the *siloviki* is only covered by Putin.

Article 68 of the Constitution is about culture and language. The 2020 amendment on the first para of the article is significant:

The 1993 version: *The Russian language shall be a state language on the whole territory of the Russian Federation.*

The 2020 version: *The Russian language shall be a state language on the whole territory of the Russian Federation as the language of the state-forming nation that is a part of the multinational union of equal peoples of the Russian Federation* (Sadowski, 2022).

The new formulation of the article carries Russian language beyond being official language of all republics. The new version of the article, as it has been in previous version, continues to grant the right of use own republic languages with the Russian language in

official transactions. On the other hand, the amendment has redefined the Russian language that is not only the official language of all-states but also the language of the nation who has found the state. So, again, as the Communist Party Programme of the USSR had done, the newly adopted constitution of Russia has given the Russian nation a priority above other nations of the Federation despite in the preliminary section, the Constitution reaffirms the multinational character of the Russian Federation.

ARTICLE 67*1

1. The Russian Federation is the legal successor of the Union of SSR within its territory, and a legal successor (legal continuator) of the Union of SSR as regards membership in international organizations and their bodies, participation in international treaties, and as regards obligations of the Union of SSR foreseen by international treaties and its active assets outside the territory of the Russian Federation.

2. The Russian Federation, united by the millennium history, preserving the memory of the ancestors who conveyed to us ideals and belief in God, as well as continuity of development of the Russian state, recognizes the unanimity of the State that was established historically.

3. The Russian Federation honours the memory of the defenders of the Fatherland, ensures protection of historical truth. Diminution of the heroic deed of the people defending the Fatherland is precluded.

ARTICLE 125

6. Acts or certain provisions thereof, which are recognized as unconstitutional, shall lose force; international treaties of the Russian Federation, which do not correspond to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, shall not be implemented or used. Acts or certain provisions thereof, which are recognized as constitutional in their interpretation given by the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, shall not be implemented in another interpretation.

The article about implementation of international treaties is interesting. There is no universal consensus on the rank/supremacy of international treaties when they encounter with domestic law. Whereas the Constitutional Courts in modern democracies

have authority to check the compatibility of laws with the Constitutional rules, the international affairs universally has left to the authority of the executive branch. In general, an international treaty shall become effective in a country, when the legislative branch of that country has enacted a law covering the index of the treaty. However, without giving a reason, the new Russian Constitution needed to emphasize the supremacy of the domestic laws against international law (Article 125/6). In contrast, the Russian Constitution that is enacted in 1993 could not supervise the former international treaties signed by the USSR. However, newly amended article 67/1 states that as the legal successor of the USSR, the Russian Federation bounds to the obligations of the treaties the USSR signed. Rather than insisting on the place of the Russia in the world, the article and the emphasize on the USSR seem to an attempt to construct a continuity with the rest of the Russian history and controversial Soviet period. Referring the legacy of Great Patriotic War and listing the millennium lasted history and faith as the unitary features of the country.

As a result, the amendments to the 1993 Constitution with the 2020 Referendum prepared the legal ground for construction of new Russian identity; that is led by Russian speakers, owning each part of the millennium lasted history as the continuation of single Russian state under different banners, accepting the faith as a stimulator power of unity.

Our aim so far in this study was to understand the historical development of the concepts of the Russian state, national, and imperial identities across Russia's history. More than a thousand years of Russian history were brought into discussion both because Putin discusses all of these periods and also because these provide the background for current identities.

3.3. PUTIN'S INTELLECTUAL INSPIRATIONS

3.3.1. Valery Tishkov

As an academic in history and philology and also a member of the Presidential Council on Ethnic Relations, Valery Tishkov can be considered as the official speaker on nationality issues in Russia after his appointment by V. Putin. After the collapse of the

Soviet Union, millions of Russians, most of whom have Russian citizenship, remained in lands outside Russia, forming a large diaspora who, speaking the Russian language, felt that they belonged to Russia. Arguing that Russians face pressure, especially in Central Asia, Ukraine, and the Baltic republics, Tishkov claims that Russian language must be made an official language in these countries (Tishkov, 2008, p. 2). Until the 1940s, the meaning of the word Russian (*ruskaya*) was obscure and has defined the people of whole state or at least the Orthodox people (Tishkov, 1995, p. 50). It is possible to see how far this claim is from the truth, in the inconsistent and unanimous history of Russia. On the other hand, Tishkov's claim is parallel to the view that the Slavic nations in the Soviet Union distanced themselves from the Russian identity with Lenin's policies. Tishkov especially advocated for the status of Russian culture and the Russian language in Ukraine (Tishkov, 2008, p. 40), arguing the country has more than 10 million ethnic Russians (Tishkov, 2008, p. 42), and Russian speakers frequently appealed to the Ukrainian courts about barriers on the Russian language.

As we will reveal in the analysis section, the USSR, whose survival was in need of the tight control of the communist party, was a central bureaucratic system according to Tishkov, and this system weakened the federal founding principle of the USSR and made the state a unitary character (Tishkov, 1989, p. 194). In this respect, our view that the USSR is the continuation of the Russian Empire and that it displays an imperial character is close to Tishkov's approach.

3.3.2. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a famous dissident of the USSR. As an ordinary captain at the Belarusian front in 1945, Solzhenitsyn did not feel that the war was conducted with sense was disillusioned with the Soviet regime (Fedyashin & Kondoyanidi, 2009, p. 44). His letters to his friend about his dissatisfaction about the war leadership resulted in his imprisonment and later he was imprisoned in the working camps of Siberia. He has become famous with his book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Desinovich*. In the book, he has described the harsh conditions of the camps. He benefited from Khrushchev's destalinization and could publish his book. Khrushchev proclaimed himself as the builder of humanitarian, pluralistic socialism. However, in the 1970s, under the Brezhnev administration, his works, especially the *Gulag Archipelago* has caused him

to be labelled as anti-communist. Gulag Archipelago has left no place for hesitation about Solzhenitsyn's anti-communism. On the other hand, there was no evidence in that book of his Russian nationalism. In contrast, from the late 1970s, his writings are associated with Russian nationalism more than any ideology. As maintained by Rowley, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's anti-communism has a nationalist background, and his nationalism had an anti-Western perspective. Solzhenitsyn distinguishes Russian identity from the Western values of individualism, materialism, anti-religious tendencies, and especially consumerism which is alien to Russian tradition (Fedyashin & Kondoyanidi, 2009, p. 60; Rowley, 1997)

In line with Solzhenitsyn, the USSR under the slogan of "friendship of peoples" has damaged the tradition of peaceful coexistence of people (Solzhenitsyn & Klimoff, 1991, p. 6). The relations became so devastated that preventing ethnic tension was only possible by utter separation. The titular republics are so decentralized that their recentralization could only be achieved by coercive measures. He was referring to the titular republics of Central Asia, Baltics, and Southern Caucasus. Solzhenitsyn was aware of how much territory Russia would relinquish after separation. Blaming Lenin for drawing borders without considering demographic and historical realities, he was especially pointing out the Kazakhstan issue. He claimed that the northern part of that country was built by Russians and populated by them while the "original territories of Kazakh people" was limited to the shores of the Caspian Sea and south of the country. Although Kazakhs were less than half of the population in the country, the separation of Kazakhstan would mean the loss of all Kazakh territory. Solzhenitsyn blamed Yeltsin for this issue (Fedyashin & Kondoyanidi, 2009, p. 64). However, Solzhenitsyn did not always back the rights of Russians. For instance, he blames the USSR for changing the status of Nagorno-Karabakh in favor of Azerbaijani which was done for the alliance with Turkey (Solzhenitsyn & Klimoff, 1991, p. 8). In this sense, he does not only back the Russians but also the Orthodox people.

Solzhenitsyn's perspective was a Russian Union after the dissolution of the USSR. According to him, Little Russians, Great Russians, and Belarusians have formed the Russian identity since the 8th century. The USSR's collapse was a sudden event, and it could not happen without the consent of the Russian center. Agreeing with that hypothesis, Solzhenitsyn has asserted that Russia did not have enough energy to

assimilate the periphery economically and morally. The use of the word assimilation is not surprising to hear from a Russian nationalist, because he regards Russian nationalism as benevolent which includes converting to Orthodoxy and/or potting in the Russian language. For him, the ambitious desire for being a superpower deprived Russia of dignity in both moral and economic senses in favor of periphery republics' welfare (Rowley, 1997, p. 328). As can be seen in the analysis section, Putin tells that the Russians were sacrificed for the hallucinations of the Bolsheviks. According to Berdyaev, actually dominating large lands is not suitable for the Russians. In this way, the Russians were sacrificed during the imperial period as well. The USSR also betrayed the nature of the Russian identity by gaining an expansionist character through the fault of the Russian Empire (Berdyaev, 2015, p.196). Just like the Moscow, third Rome theme of the Empire, the Third International under the leadership of the USSR is not the Russian messianism itself, but its corrupt form (Berdyaev, 2015, p.217). At this point, it will be clear that Solzhenitsyn's thoughts are similar to Berdyaev's. Berdyaev, on the other hand, said that because Russian identity is universal, naïve, and messianic, it inevitably brings the socialist system. Even if it had not been systematized prior to the 1917 Revolution, a system comparable to socialism would evolve in Russia (Berdyaev, 2015, pp. 8, 98). In this regard, Berdyaev's ideas appear to differ from those of Solzhenitsyn, who was antagonistic to the USSR, and Putin, who blames the USSR for the fragmentation of Russian identity. Solzhenitsyn, like Berdyaev, adheres that the USSR's expansionist orientation undermined Russian identity. Putin differs compared to them in this sense by acknowledging that the geography of the former Soviet Union is Russia's near abroad. It is not only the USSR but the Russian nation now encountering with the threat of dissolution due to its low birth rates. Therefore, the well-being of the Russian core is more important than holding large territories (Solzhenitsyn & Klimoff, 1991, p. 11).

Hinging on family ties, Solzhenitsyn considers himself half-Ukrainian but he rejects the existence of the Ukrainian language in the far past. He supports the theory that Rus' was a single unity and only after the Mongol invasion, it was divided into three branches (Solzhenitsyn & Klimoff, 1991, p. 14). Orthodoxy and Kyiv was the residence of the first baptized Russian princes therefore have a significant place in this common Rus' history. Belarusians and Ukrainians who have kept their religion against Catholicism despite living in Poland and Lithuania mean that they considered themselves Russian.

Solzhenitsyn continues that the declaration of independence of Ukraine in 1917 was not based on the popular will but the will of certain Ukrainian elite. The same accusation was directed to the modern Ukrainian administration by Putin, that their pro-Western and anti-Russian policies are against the will of the Ukrainian people. Solzhenitsyn argued that an artificial Ukrainian language was invented in Galicia with the pursuit of the Austria-Hungarian Empire (Solzhenitsyn & Klimoff, 1991, pp. 16 - 17).

It should be stated at this point that any political order or political thinker who wants to preserve order in Russia is eager to place the West against Russia. For instance, while the USSR was the rival of the Western liberal world as Solzhenitsyn defined as materialistic, he blames the Bolsheviks for introducing Western values in Russia (Rowley, 1997, p. 323). Anti-Western discourse has usually met with support in Russia whether it comes from the government or the opposition. Although Solzhenitsyn accepts the sufferings of Ukraine during the Soviet period, he also assesses Ukraine as the organic part of Russia. As he claims for Kazakhstan, he claims that the “original Ukraine” is smaller than modern Ukraine. Crimea and Donbas are the territories called “Novorossiia” (New Russia), therefore belonging to Russia proper. Thereby, separation of Ukraine from Russia’s orbit should depend on the plebiscite principle. In this regard, Putin’s ideas were akin to Solzhenitsyn’s. Both of them promoted the unity of Russian and Ukrainian nations through giving examples from history.

For Solzhenitsyn, Gorbachev administration was too kind (Spiegel Interview with Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 2007). Yeltsin, in the opinion of Solzhenitsyn, has given too much authority to local governments to get their support and thus paved the way for demands for independence (ibid). Solzhenitsyn stated that the anti-Western propaganda in Russia gained a stronghold because of brutal NATO bombings of Serbia and the accession of Eastern European countries to NATO. Moreover, it has reached its peak when relations with NATO and Ukraine gained momentum (ibid). These occasions are betrayals of the West, despite Russian support to the West after September 11. Even during his exile in the West, Solzhenitsyn was critical of the Western perspective of evaluating the USSR and Russian history in the same pot. In contrast, for Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet Period was not a part of Russian history (Osnos, 1980), unlike Putin.

Putin considers Solzhenitsyn a real patriot (“Putin Hails Solzhenitsyn As ‘True Patriot’ On Centenary Of His Birth,” 2018), and shares his ideas that the Ukrainian state has stretched out some historically Russian lands (Eltsov, 2015).

3.3.3. Alexander Dugin

The second thinker widely annotated in Putin’s discourse is Alexander Dugin (Rascoe, 2022; Varshizky, 2022; Burton, 2022; Tolstoy & McCaffray, 2015). He has become famous after being one of the leaders of Pamyat, a nationalist organization founded in 1987. Taking geopolitician Halford J. Mackinder’s ideas on controlling Eastern Europe as a critical role to be a global power at the center (Dugin, 2017, p. 15), Dugin argues that without handling Ukraine, Russia could not preserve its place as a powerful country in world politics (Dunlop, 2001, p. 4).

Solzhenitsyn who is not an Eurasianist and opposed the expansionist-chauvinist Russian nationalism by defending the independence of the peripheral republics also demanded the unification of the three Eastern Slavic - Orthodox nations, which he argues to have separated from the same core. Solzhenitsyn advocates not the expansionist ambitions of the imperial or Soviet periods but reestablishing borders at the times of the Moscow Principality and the Kyiv State, “whose population and language were predominantly Russian”. Stating that Russia is in danger of extinction, Solzhenitsyn is in favor of a defensive and limited expansion geared to identity protection. Solzhenitsyn rejects the leadership role assigned to Russia by the idea of Eurasianism, stating that Russian resources are exhausted by the desire to become a great power.

3.3.4. Dmitrii Trenin

Trenin defines himself as an anti-Eurasianist also prioritizes re-establishing Russian rule in Eastern Europe, most notably in Belarus and Ukraine (Dunlop, 2001, p. 118). He argues that the re-unification of Ukraine and Belarus to Russia is necessary to counter the demographic threat of China in the East. This will then give Russia the power to take the historically Russian regions of Kazakhstan, just as Solzhenitsyn expressed. Trenin wants to seize the same lands in order to protect geopolitical balance with a defensive concept. According to Trenin, the real threat comes from the pressure that

Chinese demographics will create in far Asia. However, Trenin, like Solzhenitsyn, states that Russia needs at least a breathing respite.

Dugin states that the domination of Eastern Europe is key to being dominant in the world as a Eurasian power. According to Dugin, Russian identity is identical to empire, and giving up the empire is equivalent to giving up the Russian identity. Therefore, Eurasianism is a tool for Dugin to challenge American domination (Tolstoy & McCaffray, 2015, p. 27). Dugin states that the developments in Gorbachov's period meant a major geopolitical defeat for Russia, and this was reiterated by Putin too (Dunlop, 2001). In this context, the common point of the conservative camp represented by Solzhenitsyn, the Eurasian camp led by Dugin and the anti-Eurasian criticism directed by Trenin was the reincorporation of historical Russian lands into Russia.

The leading figures of conservatism (Solzhenitsyn), ambitious Eurasianism (Dugin) and anti-Eurasianism (Trenin) have all influenced Putin directly. At this point, whereas Trenin has positioned himself against Eurasianism, it is impossible to think of him without Eurasianism. Because whereas he is rejecting the idea of being great power as Putin did (Russia Doesn't Aspire to Be Superpower, 2013), claiming on ancient Rus' territories which belong to other sovereign countries at the moment is even beyond "the near abroad" vision of the Yeltsin era.

3.3.5. Gennady Zyuganov

Another important figure, who publicly supports Putin's foreign policies and at last the war with Ukraine, is Gennady Zyuganov. As the chairman of the Russian Federation Communist Party, he accepts the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union's perception of the Russian nation by perceiving the Russian people as the spiritual core of the country (Zyuganov, 2020). Pursuant to Zyuganov Russians are not only the most important ethnic group in Russia but are important for the rest of the world. The geopolitical stability of the world owes many things to the character, ethics, and morality of the Russians. As a communist party leader with the claim of being international, he needed to be the last man in Russia emphasizing the uniqueness of Russians. He criticizes the West due to its imperialist past and current individualistic attitudes in Western societies but at the same time, he does not hesitate to give the leading role to an ethnic

group in a country that has hundreds of ethnicities. Zyuganov praised the wars of Moscow against Tatar domination between 1240 and 1462, the expansion of Russian territories during the Tsardom which was achieved by peaceful/persuasive methods for him, and Stalin's rapid industrialization process at the expense of millions of Ukrainians and Kazakhs starvation. With the help of traitor Yeltsin, Zyuganov argued, the single Russian civilization was splashed out into three pieces, and Russia, Belorussia and Ukraine emerged.

3.3.6. Ivan Ilyin, Konstantin P. Pobedonostsev and Assessment on Triune Nation

It is controversial when the theme of the triune nation emerged. Putin blesses the partial incorporation of the modern Ukrainian lands in the mid-17th century as the reunification of the historical Russian lands. However, throughout the 19th century, Russia saw the Ukrainian identity as an invention of the Catholic neighbors and suppressed it. In official historiography and even allowing Belarus and Ukraine to be admitted as members of the United Nations⁶, the Soviet Union became the political authority of Moscow, which directly adopted the theme of the triune nation. And especially Pobedonostsev's assimilation perspective tells us that Russian Empire was not about triune nation. It is not possible to definitively determine Putin's approach to the idea of a triune nation from his narratives, which changes at very short intervals in the light of global power fluctuations and the situation on the front⁷. On the other hand, it is clear that Putin can welcome the idea of a triune nation not in the context of equal partnership, but only when the privileged and guiding role of the Great Russians is accepted. Considering the influence of rehabilitated White Russians⁸ on Putin, who was firmly opposed to the initial tripartite partnership, it can be said that even the privileged position of guidance, which would remain hidden in the Great Russians instead of absolute assimilation, would be a forced acceptance for Putin (Kuzio, 2022, p. 42). One of the White Russians who is seen to be influential on Putin with his quotations⁹ is Ivan Ilyin, a political philosopher

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfcBEL5mQQQ>

⁷ 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine

⁸ White Russians, in opposition to the Red Army of Bolsheviks, was the monarchist side of the Russian civil war

⁹ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66975>
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173>

who has defended the constitutional monarchy against the Soviet regime. Ilyin has ascribed the naivety that Putin attributes to the Russian nation and state in his rhetoric to Russian philosophy. Berdyaev goes further and described Russian naivety as militant goodness (Berdyaev, 2015, p. 3). As believed by Ilyin, this naivety is the weakness of Russia and Russia should get rid of it in the very approach (Ilyin, 2018, p. 6). In addition, while Ilyin emphasized that physical fighting is the only productive method of struggle against evil, his views were also met by the Russian public and came to light with the support given to the Second Chechen War (Robinson, 2003), p. 151). Ilyin's ideas are akin to and comparable to Solzhenitsyn's. As Solzhenitsyn, he was negative about Western modernism. The West, as said by Ilyin, released this anti-Christian toxin to Russia. As maintained by Ilyin, materialism and nihilism decimate familial and moral values (Kuzio, 2022). In order to understand the monarchist Ivan Ilyin, it would be appropriate to examine Pobedonostsev, who marked the last years of Tsarism. Pobedonostsev was an uncompromising monarchist. Alexander III has intermittently employed him as an advisor from 1881 to 1905. Pobedonostsev has defined the concept of sovereignty as a political principle that has no value in practice. Because Western democracy and parliament, based on the principle of sovereignty, reflect the personal ambitions and interests of the elites, not the people's will (Pobedonostsev, 1898, p. 34). When it comes to sovereignty, as we would see in Putin's narratives, Russia has progressed within 100 years up to the level of understanding in which sovereignty can only belong to privileged nations. Pobedonostsev considered the assimilation of local communities as a necessity of the modern age while he rejects democracy as it is not an appropriate method to govern a multicultural society in the first place (Pobedonostsev, 1898, pp. 32 - 34). Pobedonostsev sees the parliaments of Slavic states as a bad imitation of the West (Pobedonostsev, 1898, p. 52). We understand from this that it is an old tradition in Russia not to see Western culture and institutions as suitable for Slavic and Russian people. According to Pobedonostsev, Russian culture and the Orthodox faith are inclusive for everyone in Russia. So much so that even Europeans who have just arrived in Russia begin to feel like Russian after a while without any coercion, and they even join the Orthodox church without any discomfort (Pobedonostsev, 1898, p. 195), that was explained by Berdyaev to universality of Russian culture, (Berdyaev, 2015, p. 2). In addition, it is possible to find contradictions

in Pobedonostsev's writings akin to Putin. He has asserted that Russians do not act against anyone due to their non-Orthodox beliefs (Pobedonostsev, 1898, p. 196). However, recognizing the Protestant faith is very different from death for Russians discomfort (ibid). Pursuant to Putin, Ukrainians are brothers of Russians, but a Ukraine outside of the Russian influence sphere could not be distinguished from a weapon of mass destruction.

As a monarchist, Ilyin looks at humanity through an elitist approach. He believes that not everyone has a personality. Those who are deprived of this privilege are dispossessed of the necessary capacity to have rights (Ilyin, 2011, p. 67). It is impossible not to recall here that Putin saw Ukraine deprived of features entitled to the right of being a real state.

Ilyin stated that Rousseau defines the state as a political order that emerged with the will of individuals. He disputed with the veracity of this definition. The state, Ilyin claimed, is a holy spirit that has always dwelt (Ilyin, 2011, p. 163). Putin claims analogous to Ilyin that the Russian nation and state, as well as the triple nation motif, have existed since unknown periods. Ilyin used state and nation as interchangeably, because, for him, national awareness is a unifying faith whose historical beginning is not clear (Ilyin, 2011, pp. 166 - 170). He uses the word "primordial" directly to define national spirit while having given a spiritual meaning to the state embedded in the national organism (Ilyin, 2011, pp. 167, 171). Even religion emerged to understand and explain the eternity/sanctity of the state (Ilyin, 2011, pp. 179 - 183). That was the continuation of Byzantine Orthodox tradition that state has an absolute control over the religion in contrast with Western Christianity.

The fact that having referred to or aligns with so many opposing sources of ideas does not necessarily mean that Putin has utterly embraced their ideas. His respect for A. Soljenitsin and references to Ilyin in his speeches should be evaluated in this sense. For example, in accordance with Kuzio, Putin is trying to bring together the Russian world, based on the unity of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians (Kuzio, 2022, pp. 4 - 5) in Solzhenitsyn's scheme. However, when Putin's narratives about Ukraine are examined, it is difficult to say that he wants to give the Ukrainian/Little Russian identity a partnership equivalent to the Great Russians. Thus, it can be said that Putin is close to the monarchist

Ivan Ilyin, who has justified imperial Russia, which suppressed or even denied the Ukrainian identity. As a pragmatist politician, Putin says he will cleanse Ukraine from Neonazis. At the same time, he can often quote Ilyin who admired Nazism and Italian fascism (Laqueur, 2015, p. 58).

3.3.7. Review of Russian Thinkers

This section, which aims to explain Putin's intellectual background, puts forth directly beyond its purpose; however, its most definitive conclusion, which is fundamentally important and will help to explain it more easily, is why Putin's domestic approval ratings have not fallen below 60 percent (Levada Center, 2022) throughout his rule. Because, whether their ideas are taken into account by the broad masses or by social scientists, Russian thinkers and politicians with very different ideologies agree in supporting Putin's foreign policy even his recent archrival, jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny who claimed that Russia has the right on Crimea^{10 11}, despite Navalny presented himself against imperial ambitious of Russia¹².

Russians and Ukrainians are one nation and backed Russia's takeover of Crimea. Having not fallen under 60 percent and 70 percent in average (Levada Center, 2022), Putin's approval ratings also tell us that these ideas have a social reciprocation.

Almost every policy of the Russian state apparatus since Moscow State has depended on getting more territory and keeping them at all costs. Because the Russian mentality measured power by territorial extension, Eurasianism which promised at least getting parts of the former USSR provinces has represented returning to the vicious circle of Russians in history. What is forgotten was that Russia could not compete in scientific innovation, trade power, production efficiency, and literacy rate with the Western powers in any time during the Russian Empire. Decolonization of Western powers has not made

¹⁰ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/alexei-navalny-is-a-russian-nationalist-but-he-may-still-be-good-news-for-ukraine/>

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/17/world/europe/navalnys-comments-on-crimea-ignite-russian-tweetsphere.html>

¹² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/09/30/alexei-navalny-parliamentary-republic-russia-ukraine/>

their homelands deprived of all aspects of the welfare as it has occurred after the dissolution of the USSR.

In a nutshell, the politicians and thinkers who present themselves as caring for Russia are just concerned about the invasion or partition of Russia, and they are not concerned with the development or internal structure of Russia. In this case, being as a whole and big is more important than anything else. The identity building and the claiming territory with strategic and/or historical significance are related. The indispensable reasoning for territorial claims is the rhetoric of victimhood. “Russians are always suffering”: Orthodox Russians suffer under non-religious Bolsheviks, Russian ethnicity suffers under civil nationalism, Russian messianism suffers under Western capitalism, and Russian imperial identity suffers under the Atlantic bloc.

CHAPTER 4 - ANALYSIS OF PUTIN'S NARRATIVES

4.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1.1. The literature on ethnic and national identity

There are three basic views of the nation: Primordialism, situationalism, constructivism. Primordialism views nations, and ethnic groups arising from common descent, blood and kinship ties, and thereby nation as given, inherent, and even “natural” phenomena. Ethnicity exists since time immemorial and pre-political. Situationalism views nations and ethnic identities as by-products or concomitant to economic, political, or social structures, most of all the processes of modernization. The nation is a modern phenomenon and closely related to the process of modern state-building, which paved the way for the emergence of the nation-state as the dominant actor in modern international relations. Constructivism agrees that national identities emerge within the modern processes along with other identities but they do not correspond to “real” phenomena. Instead, they are collectively imagined through ideological or institutional frameworks (Brown, 2000). According to Brubaker, nations are not pre-existing collectivities but are categories, claims, and projects formed by elites first of all and adopted by masses through mobilization, claim-making, and discursive processes. Calhoun also supports the view that nations are constructed through discourse. Nations are “one of the modern sets of categorical identities invoked by elites and other participants in political and social struggles”. These categorical identities help us shape “specific versions of those identities”. Nationalism is the preeminent rhetoric to demarcate political communities. Kedourie argued the discourse of nationalism ideal typically put forward (i) humanity is naturally divided into nations (ii) nations are certain characteristics which can be ascertained (iii) the only legitimate type of government is self-government (Calhoun, 1993, p. 213). Categories or presumptions of discourse of nation are ingrained in our everyday language. Nation refers to singleness, integrity, boundedness, homogeneity,

consolidation, and dense internal networking. The legitimacy of the foundation of the nationalist approach, according to Gellner, is essentially founded on the fact that ethnic borders are not split by political borders (Walicki, 1998). These claims are used to suppress relatively unimportant internal variations, and also exclude both internal and external “others” of the “self”. Claims to nationhood are not only internal claims to social solidarity, common descent, and political community but also external claims to certain rights and right to self-determination (Seton-Watson, 1977 as cited in Calhoun, 1993, p. 216). Most importantly, constructivism defines the nation as a particular way of thinking about what it means to be a people (Calhoun, 1997, p. 524).

We will next examine how these theories apply to the Russian case and how the Russian nation and nationalism were interpreted in the literature.

4.1.2. The understanding of Russian identity in the literature: Ethnonational, or imperial?

In the Russian empire, the Tsars identified nationalism with the revolutionary ideas of the French Revolution, which are liberty and equality. Nationalism meant a popular democracy for many revolutionaries of the Empire in the 1990s too. Both tsars and revolutionaries thought in empire terms and never implied nationalism in the Russian ethnic sense. We can also think that Russian Empire was preoccupied with empire-building and did not see the need for nation-building. Nation-building was postponed one more time in the Soviet period to a later date. Russian Empire did not follow assimilation as other multi-ethnic states and empires such as the USA, Great Britain, and France tried to create a civic nation (Tuminez, 2000, p. 25). Russification which was introduced from time to time in the 19th and 20th centuries was limited in its application and outcomes.

The literature is divided when it comes to Russian nationalism. While some purport that Russian nationalism is a significant phenomenon (Laruelle, 2009, p. 3; Tolz, 2001, p. 18). Others claimed that it is marginal (Motyl, 1990, pp. 170 - 173) or absent (Rowley, 2000; Tuminez, 2000, p. 25; Seton-Watson, 1986). The reason for these hugely opposing interpretations is the unique characteristic of Russian nationalism, which is overlapping of imperial and national identities. For Motyl, imperialism and nationalism are polar types, therefore he claims there cannot be nationalism when there is imperialism.

However, nationalism does not have to be based on ethnic ties. Any strategy aiming to homogenize a country's population (even several countries' populations) to create a common identity, aiming for a common political project is nationalist (Deutsch, 1966; Gellner, 1983). Anderson also points out various types of imagined communities. We can argue that a multicultural, Ottoman nationalism -so-called Ottomanism- was conceived to save the Ottoman Empire. Pan-nationalisms appeal to not so ethnically close communities and diaspora nationalisms also appeal to ethnically hybrid communities. As noted earlier, we can think of ethnicity as constructed as well.

Historically, the Russian identity was conceptualized by “imperial tendencies – pride in a large, strong and multi-ethnic state” in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016, p. 1). Indeed, many also noted that the Soviet Union can be understood as an empire too. Similarly, the first ‘R’ in the RSFSR was not *ruskii* (*ethnic Russian*) but *rossiiskii* (*from Russia*), and this vast republic was not intended to be or understood as a copy of the Soviet Union. Russian Federation was never conceived as a nation-state, and it lacked some basic attributes of Union republics, such as a separate party and separate institutions including its own branch of the Academy of Sciences. This was seen as unnecessary and duplicating as the respective Soviet structures were located in the center of the state. Moreover, Russian-language schools and cultural institutions existed throughout the Soviet Union, not concentrating on a certain territory. For these reasons, Russians more than non-Russians identified with the USSR as their fatherland and could not territorialize Russian identity.

But in post-Soviet Russia, we observe the emergence of Russian ethnonational identity for the first time (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016, p. 1). This takes the forms of “racism and xenophobia, but also as a new intellectual movement of ‘national democracy’ that deliberately seeks to emulate conservative West European nationalism”. Some dissidents such as Solzhenitsyn and Soldatov belonged to this group of ethnic nationalists (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016, p. 26). Alekseev, Blakkisrud point to the ethnocultural Russkiy core emphasized on Russian Orthodoxy (Alekseev, 2016; Blakkisrud, 2016).

Kolstø explains the situation as such:

Traditionally, Russian nationalists have focused on the perceived need to maintain a large and strong state, and have been far less concerned with ethnic

interests and racial purity. These nationalists are usually referred to as ‘statists’ (gosudarstvenniki) or with the more derogatory term ‘imperialists’ (impertsy). Opposed to them are ethnonationalists who fight for the interests not so much of the Russian state but of the Russian people, ethnically defined. These two groups distrust, even hate, each other in their pursuit of opposing political goals (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016, p. 1).

State nationalism strengthened beginning in the 2000s. Blakkusrus calls this idea “civic patriotism”. Other values accompanying this were ‘great-powerness’ (*derzhavnost*), ‘state centrism’ (*gosudarstvennichestvo*) and ‘social solidarity’ – as ‘primordial, traditional Russian (*rossiiskie*) values’ (Putin, 1999). Similarly, Russian identity is conceived as neo-imperialist as Russia tried to create an empire from the ex-Soviet lands based on its 19th century notion of “sphere of influence” (Kuzio, 2015; Herpen, 2014). Eurasianism also supports this type of imperialism as it is based on a unified Russian state, Orthodoxy, Russian language, and culture as a common value system.

In addition to state nationalists and ethnonationalists, Kolstø also notes that a third model exists in which “statist and imperial nation” concepts are combined, and he calls this supremacist nationalism. Emil Pain argues that this third type is the predominant form and identifies it as “imperial nationalism” as a combination of imperial identity and ethnonationalism, despite this concept sounds as an oxymoron (Pain, 2016).

The combination of Russian nationalism and imperial consciousness is conducive to the development of a special phenomenon in Russia that may be called ‘imperial nationalism’. Pain points out the preservation of characteristics of the empire in the post-Soviet period and proposes the theoretical construct “imperial syndrome” that draws attention to the empire’s political organization (the imperial ‘order’), its political ‘body’ (territorial arrangement), and finally, the type of mass consciousness characteristic of an empire (Pain, 2016, p. 47). For him, Russian imperial nationalism is anti-Western and essentialist. It is essentialist because exceptional, eternal cultural qualities of the Russian people that distinguished them from other peoples. Russian nationalism must serve autocracy and empire. Russians must also dominate the empire and have preferential rights.

It was Yeltsin who first suggested “*rossiane*” (people from Russia) instead of “*russskiy*” in the 1990s to denote a common national identity for the citizens of the Russian Federation (Alexseev, 2016, p. 160). However, Putin shifted to “*russskiy*” in his “annexation” speech on Crimea in 2014. This shows imperial nationalism as a combination of ethnic and imperial components. He married those components by arguing that Russia is the defender of Russians abroad, the “Russian world” (*Russkiy Mir*).

Still, the idea of “*rossiane*” was celebrated by some academics and policy-makers. Referring to Brzezinski, Tishkov noted the possibility of the emergence of Russian civic nation, and indeed pointed out certain precursors of it, and advantages of RF to constitute such a nation (Tishkov, 1995, p. 41). He made a distinction between the Russian words ‘*narod*’ and ‘*natsia*’ in which the first points out Russian ethnicity while the second describes the Russian civic nation- a supra-ethnic conglomerate of Russian and other ethnicities (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016, pp. 44 - 45). Most importantly, Russia is quite homogenous as it is composed of more than 80 percent of Russians. Shevel, however, questions the existence of a civic understanding of the Russian nation (Shevel, 2011).

Theoretical Framework:

We suggest the following theoretical framework to understand the construction of Russian identity in Putin’s discourse.

- (i) Elite discourses contribute to the reception of nationalist discourses and in turn reproduction of them by regular people.
- (ii) Putin engages in ethnic nationalism, however Russian ethnicity was constructed in a way to include Ukrainians and Belarusians.
- (iii) At the same time, by attempting to seize territory, and using anti-Western rhetoric to unite, the reproduction of positive myths on Russia’s multi-ethnic past while avoiding narratives of conflict, Putin also demonstrates its imperial nationalism and appeals the non-ethnic Russians and the so-called Russian world and Russian speakers.

Before Putin replaced Medvedev to be president again in early 2012, as prime minister, Putin asserted that Russia is a multi-cultural distinctive civilization in a newspaper article. The core point of that unique civilization was the leadership and unifying role of Ethnic/Great Russians besides Russian culture (Putin, 2012).

4.2. THE ANALYSIS OF PUTIN'S NARRATIVE

Utilizing the understanding that national, imperial, and other identities are constituted of specific discourses, in Putin's content analysis we set out to explore how Putin seeks to re-construct the Russian identity in two ways: Putin's combination of ethnic nationalism and imperial nationalism, and Putin's attempt to define Russia's place in the world politics and international relations.

Evidence for both "imperial nationalism" and "ethnic nationalism" can be found in Putin's narrative, and both are combined in an interesting way. The Russian people are valued as supreme and benign rulers of other nations. For instance, Putin asserts that Eastern Europe owes its freedom to the Russian people. Putin repeatedly mentions the naivety of the Russians here because the Soviet elites decided to dissolve the Soviet Union, and the Soviet peoples did not react to this decision (*Munich Speech, 2007*).

Articles and speeches used as sources of Putin narratives which will be analyzed under three themes, are as follows with their short titles:

- 1 – Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007
(*Munich Speech, 2007*)
- 2 – Address by President of the Russian Federation, March 18, 2014
(*On Annexation of Crimea, 2014*)
- 3 – Article by Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", July 12, 2021
(*Article on Unity, 2021*)
- 4 – Address by the President of the Russian Federation, February 21, 2022
(*On Eastern Ukraine, Feb. 2022*)
- 5 – Address by the President of the Russian Federation, February 24, 2022
(*On Special Military Operation, Feb. 2022*)

4.2.1. The Nature of Russian Identity

This frame is dedicated to understanding Putin's perspectives on definitions of Russia and, Russians and diversities within Russia which are being tangible once his ideas on Ukrainians and other non-Russian people of Russia's near abroad geography analyzed through interrogation of his narratives.

Putin's allusions to the legacy of the Russian Empire show his comfort in propagating an imperial state. It is interesting as over-identification with the Ottoman Empire or British Empire is quite controversial in the respective countries. For instance, Putin cannot accept the possibility that Sevastopol, a symbol of the Russian Empire would host a NATO fleet. Similarly, Putin's obsession with "Novorossia" (southern Ukraine) since 2014, and even the 2022 invasion of surrounding territory by Putin's army shows the importance of the historical myth about the Russian Empire, as these were the territories conquered by Catherine the Great from the Ottoman Empire. Putin narrates that:

"In the second half of the 18th century, following the wars with the Ottoman Empire, Russia incorporated Crimea and the lands of the Black Sea region, which became known as Novorossiia. They were populated by people from all of the Russian provinces. After the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian Empire regained the western Old Russian lands, with the exception of Galicia and Transcarpathia, which became part of the Austrian – and later Austro-Hungarian Empire (Article on Unity, 2021).

Regarding Ukraine Putin harbours both "ethnic nationalism" and "imperial nationalism". Ethnic nationalism, even supremacist nationalism, and chauvinism are in play when Putin argues that Ukraine is not a real country, and Ukrainians are disillusioned Russians and not a separate nation. Putin evaluates the history of Eastern Slavs in accordance with primordialism. He denies nationality as a modern idea. For him, common history and faith in a same region are automatically making its concurrent residents members of the same nation. As paraphrased from Putin, territories are inseparable features of nations too. In this matter, ancient Rus land could only host Russians and relative Russified groups such as Cossacks. Ukrainians is an invented nation because its

ethnonym does not refer to any separate group of people rather but border guards (*Article on Unity*, 2021). However, studies on nationalism show that a sense of community can easily make a nation whatever the name, and subjective criteria for forming the nation is perhaps more important than the objective criteria (Seton-Watson, 1986). The methods of Bolsheviks for bounding titular republics to Moscow have promoted “the localization policy“, which took the form of Ukrainization in the Ukrainian SSR is regarded with contempt and constitutes one of the major criticisms of Putin for the Soviet policies (*Article on Unity*, 2021). Policies such as these contributed artificial construction of the Ukrainian nation, for Putin. Putin engaged in major revisionism regarding Soviet history here, and de-couples Soviet interests from Russian interests, a sign of his increasing ethnic nationalist position by 2020, when he wrote this article. He argues that the Bolsheviks with the belief that communism is the end of the civilization have used Russia for gaining time to world revolution. To strengthen their position in power, the Bolsheviks provided autonomy to locals. For Putin, the Bolsheviks sacrificed Russia for their consolidation of power at home and the imaginary world revolution (*Article on Unity*, 2021). To Putin, the result has been major damage to the unity of the Russian nation, as an aberration such as Ukraine emerged. Interestingly, Putin also states:

“The Russian Federation recognized the new geopolitical realities: and not only recognized, but, indeed, did a lot for Ukraine to establish itself as an independent country. Throughout the difficult 1990's and in the new millennium, we have provided considerable support to Ukraine (Article on Unity, 2021).

This should not be taken as an endorsement of independent Ukraine, but as recognition of Ukraine only as an attachment of the Russian state. Putin understands the practical realities conflicting with his primordialist assumptions, such that he cannot incorporate a large country, whose people have formed a separate state for a certain period. Putin is not consistent theoretically as he also applies perennialist arguments regarding the people of Ukraine, which means Ukrainian-Russian unity could be undermined at certain periods in history, but it will repeatedly rise because of the unity at the core. To Putin, the struggle for autonomy of the people of the region from the Polish-Lithuanian Union was such a historical event in which an idea of affinity with Russia re-

emerged. The incorporation of modern Ukraine lands into Russian Empire in 1686 was again a function of ancient common roots rather than comprehensive alliances and long lasted wars.

In his selective reading of history, Putin identifies Ukrainian characters not loyal to the Tsar as anti-Russian, projecting his 21st century- political views on the historical events of the 16th century. For instance, Ivan Mazepa's rebellion against Russian Tsar was viewed a diversion from natural Russian identity and a case of treason (*Article on Unity, 2021*) while Mazepa in fact made a political calculation about keeping his autonomy against growing pressure from Moscow. Stephen Bandera, who worked for independent Ukraine under Nazi occupation was quickly defamed as a Nazi criminal by Putin although historical evidence as to the extent of his collaboration is not conclusive yet. It is also true that more Russians collaborated with Nazis than Ukrainians or other nations, but this is a topic Putin or Russian politicians never bring up. Some historians argue it is more fruitful to ask why they felt they had to collaborate with Nazis, who dismissed all of the Slavic nations as *unttermenschen*.

In this way, Putin is reinforcing the idea of “disloyal Ukrainians” as Russia’s other. Thus, while Putin projects unity between Russians and Ukrainians, he simultaneously affirms Ukrainian otherness to reify Russian identity. Putin blames the idealization of historical personalities of Mazepa and Bandera in present Ukrainian historiography and appearances as a repetition of betrayals to the Russian Federation, conceived to have a continuity with Russian Empire. Putin has conceived a direct challenge to Russian historical hegemony in the region and a newly emulated Russian identity based on the glorification of the great old days, in terms of Ukrainians having chosen a local war chief whose importance was shifting side in a defensive war waged against Swedish invasion.

Even the idea of “triune Russian nation” composed of “Great Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians” which Putin seems to sympathize, is a contradiction in terms according to primordialist or perennialist logic (*Article on Unity, 2021*). This contradiction is ignored and every occasion that has led to the disintegration of the triune nation was recognized as backed by foreigners. To the question of why Putin is worried about the Russians (in Ukraine) “becoming Ukrainian” while the triune nation creates one

people, he answers that if this had developed spontaneously as a process in its natural course, there would have been no need for Russian intervention (*Article on Unity, 2021*).

Deployment of the combination of ethnic and imperial nationalist appeals can explain the high approval rate of Putin's annexation of Crimea among the Russian population. This combination was not so unequivocally resonant among citizens of the RF in the case of Donbas or the invasion of Ukraine (Hale, 2016).

Russia, which is portrayed as having good intentions alongside naivety in foreign policy, deemed to have a high level of tolerance towards non-Russian people in domestic politics too by Putin. However, as explained in the section on the Crimean Tatars, the Russification of the captured regions and limiting the communication of these regions with the rest of Russia by establishing a special administration has been in the repertoire of the regime. Only if the population density and consciousness of the seized region are high, as in the case of Poland and Finland, the Russian imperial rulers have been cautious and given a degree of autonomy to prepare the ground for further repressions. Putin has been entirely silent about those practices of the Tsarist era, while autonomies given to various peoples are harshly criticized by him as severe mistakes. However, the deportation of Crimean Tatars was not recognized as one of the crimes of the Soviet Union and was belittled by him through being compared to the suffering of Russians:

“There was a time when Crimean Tatars were treated unfairly, just as a number of other peoples in the USSR. There is only one thing I can say here: millions of people of various ethnicities suffered during those repressions, and primarily Russians.” (On Annexation of Crimea, 2014)

In conclusion, Putin brings to the fore the imaginary monoculturalism of the past through kinship and blood ties and imperial management. However, from the civilian point of view, Ukraine has been moving away from Russia ever since its independence. Russia; the tradition of not allowing competition in politics by being ruled by a single man or a single man and his circle, that is, by the authority concentrated in the tsar and his bureaucracy, or the general secretary or the politburo in the Tsarist and Soviet periods, continues in the Putin era. Russia has a system in which oligarchs, who are suspected of

getting into politics, are eliminated by feeding off its economy managed by oligarchs. Ukraine, like Russia, has an oligarch class enriched by allegedly unfair privatizations limited into a circle close to governments. However, the rivalry between the oligarchs is too high to allow for political singularity in Ukraine. For this reason, Russia has difficulties in ensuring that the pro-Russian heads of state it supports in Ukraine establish absolute dominance. Thus, despite all its closeness with Russia, Ukraine continues to move away from Russia, thanks to its political and social structure increasingly resembling the competitiveness of Western countries. This awareness may lie in Putin's military takeover of the issue.

Putin argues that Ukraine's fate is falling into the sphere of influence of Russia. The argument for separate Ukraine national identity is nothing more than "anti-Russianism", an attempt to shift from the Russian sphere of influence to the Western sphere of influence. The only supporters of independent Ukraine outside Russian influence are corrupted local elites, who since the 1920s sought to push the country away from Russia even at the expense of territorial cessions to neighboring countries. Thus, independence is only possible by betraying Ukraine itself and trying to receive the support of foreign powers. For Putin, Ukrainization was the weaponry propaganda of Catholic neighboring countries against Russia (*Article on Unity, 2021*). Pursuant to Putin,

"...true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia. Our spiritual, human and civilizational ties formed for centuries and have their origins in the same sources, they have been hardened by common trials, achievements and victories." (*Article on Unity, 2021*).

Putin also uses multiculturalism and respect for ethnic rights to strengthen his propaganda about his respect for the people of Crimea's popular will.

"We have great respect for people of all the ethnic groups living in Crimea. This is their common home, their motherland, and it would be right – I know the local population supports this – for Crimea to have three equal national languages: Russian, Ukrainian and Tatar." (*On Annexation of Crimea, 2014*).

This policy was not implemented and indeed was not ever intended to be implemented, as it is against both ethnic and imperial nationalism. It embodies the idea of civic nationalism but Putin does not really pursue that path. Abolishing Tatarstan sovereignty, continuously diminishing local governments' power, and prioritizing the Russian language with the 2020 Referendum all point to that fact.

The 17th century was the same as now in Putin's perspective: The Ukrainian region was divided between those who sought help from the Tsar and those who sought help from Sweden, Poland, or the Ottoman states as today divided between pro-Russian people and pro-Western corrupt elites as Putin emphasizes.

“Over the course of the protracted war between the Russian state and the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, some of the hetmans, successors of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, would detach themselves from Moscow or seek support from Sweden, Poland, or Turkey.” (Article on Unity, 2021)

While there were different tribal leaders who sought different alliances, mainly acting to preserve their autonomy, just as in the War of Poltava (1709), only elites on the side of Russia can reflect the true will of the people, as Putin adheres. This detail is included in the speech as proof that Putin wants to match the Cossacks' accession to Russia with today's Ukraine policy.

It becomes clear why Putin engages in claimed historical writing. It is to offer the place of Ukrainians in his present project of imperial nationalism: a most favored nationality status as before.

Cossack senior officers belonging to the nobility would reach the heights of political, diplomatic, and military careers in Russia. Graduates of Kiev-Mohyla Academy played a leading role in church life. This was also the case during the

Hetmanate an essentially autonomous state formation with a special internal structure – and later in the Russian Empire. Malorussians in many ways helped build a big common country – its statehood, culture, and science. They participated in the exploration and development of the Urals, Siberia, the Caucasus, and the Far East. Incidentally, during the Soviet period, natives of Ukraine held major, including the highest, posts in the leadership of the unified state. Suffice it to say that Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, whose party biography was most closely associated with Ukraine, led the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) for almost 30 years (Article, 2021).

Putin implies his imperial vision for Ukrainians here. Providing leading roles at the center to people from the periphery should suffice. The core is Moscow's Russians and other people close to Russian culture and from the same root is benefited from central's generosity and tolerance. Even when coercive methods to prevent the development of local languages and encouragement to conversion into Orthodox religion were occasionally implemented in the Russian Empire, it is to correct policy of foreign power to disrupt "Russian-Ukrainian unity":

"I'm not going to idealize anything. We do know there were the Valuev Circular of 1863 and then the Ems Ukaz of 1876, which restricted the publication and importation of religious and socio-political literature in the Ukrainian language. But it is important to be mindful of the historical context. These decisions were taken against the backdrop of dramatic events in Poland and the desire of the leaders of the Polish national movement to exploit the "Ukrainian issue" to their own advantage... the idea of Ukrainian people as a nation separate from the Russians started to form and gain ground among the Polish elite and a part of the Malorussian intelligentsia" (Article on Unity, 2021).

Today, Putin blames the West for the development of an independent Ukrainian identity. For him, the emergence of the same identity was the crime of Poles, again another foreign power. On the contrary, Poland was a kingdom within Russian Empire during the time Ukrainian identity becoming visible.

For Putin, if Ukraine was eager to get rid of symbols and monuments of Soviet rule, they should give back territorial gains that Soviet (Russian) authority bestowed. He resents:

“All the things that united us and bring us together so far came under attack. First and foremost, the Russian language.” (Article on Unity, 2021).

Here, Putin refers Kolesnychenko-Kivalov language law. The law aimed to make Ukrainian the sole language in government-related transactions. The Constitutional Court of Ukraine repealed it in 2018. In 2021, there was no legal restriction on the Russian language, but that could not prevent Putin to engage in disinformation.

Whenever possible, Putin associates Ukrainian politicians and actions with Nazism:

“With regard to the state of affairs in Donbass, we see that the ruling Kiev elites never stop publicly making clear their unwillingness to comply with the Minsk Package of Measures to settle the conflict and are not interested in a peaceful settlement. On the contrary, they are trying to orchestrate a blitzkrieg in Donbass as was the case in 2014 and 2015. We all know how these reckless schemes ended.” (On Eastern Ukraine, Feb. 2022).

Putin is using the word “*blitzkrieg*” here. This word indoctrinates the rapid attacks of the Nazi armies by using air and ground elements, especially tanks. To exemplify the impact of the *blitzkrieg*, German armies reached Minsk only four days after attacking the Soviet Union. This means that the Nazis were advancing at speeds approaching 100 kilometers per day. It is understood from the course of the current war that the Ukrainian army does not have such competence. In this context, the Second World War, as the last major victory in Russian history worth emphasizing, is used to glorify the Russian identity on the one hand; it also continues to be blessed as a powerful reminder that Russia lives under the constant threat of sudden attack. Thus, it has become a tradition in Putin's

Ukrainian rhetoric to reconcile his adversaries and their actions with Nazism, whatever their strength and calibre.

4.2.2. Empire, Nation, and History

Under this frame, we are analyzing Putin's narratives in terms of how they are bringing the legitimacy of imperial to the present by stressing the indivisibility of Russian history, nationhood, and state power.

According to Putin, all lands ancient Rus' set feet have become sacred Russian land and must be taken back by Russia, as done in the history of the Russian Empire:

The incorporation of the western Russian lands into the single state was not merely the result of political and diplomatic decisions. It was underlain by the common faith, shared cultural traditions, and – I would like to emphasize it once again – language similarity (Article on Unity, 2021).

Putin argues that like the importance of Crimea, Kherson is the city in that ancient Russians baptized. In the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine, Kherson was the first major city to fall into Russian hands. However, its defense is problematic especially because the Russian advance was not able to go further enough and unlike the Crimean Peninsula, it might become a burden of Russian forces entrenched here, moreover, putting them in danger of encirclement. Consistent with military logic, Kherson should have been a bridgehead for further advancement at the Western bank of the Dnieper River and must not have been invaded. Despite these facts, Kherson was among four regions Putin declared to have annexed in October 2022. The only explanation for Putin's emphasis on the region stayed in this extract, Kherson's importance for Russian conversation into Orthodox faith. For Putin, it is unacceptable that the important historical sites of Russian history would be in hostile hands, and the Kherson operation shows that was really his thinking.

However, it is interesting to see Putin ready to divide Ukraine and accept the possibility of an ethnic boundary between Russians and Ukrainians. The left bank of the Dnieper including Kyiv seems close to the legitimate territories for Ukraine in Putin's

mind. Putin justifies this with the long-term Russian dominance from the past as sufficient for a region to be considered Russian territory (*Article on Unity, 2021*).

Russian imperial nationalism is deployed at this point again by reproducing Russian Empire categories. Putin blames the USSR for creating an artificial country even greater than the relatively acceptable size. Moscow did it without any prediction about possible division. So, the in-calculated historical event could not dictate to Russia new rules to follow. He argues that Ukrainians owe to Soviet center for defending their territory from invaders and for many benefits Ukrainians attained in the Soviet Union, therefore it should compensate historical Russian efforts by giving up the territories conquered by Catherine the Great (*On Eastern Ukraine, February 2022*). Imperial nationalism is invoked in the occupation of Crimea in 2014. According to Putin, Russia, as the representative of a distinct civilization that it always claims, is being recalled to the lands it previously dominated. Putin emphasizes the historical unity of the Russian world and that the population of Crimea is full of this national and historical consciousness. Putin also appeals to ethnic nationalism here by asserting an emotional bond between the Russian motherland and the people of Russian identity in Crimea (*On Annexation of Crimea, 2014*). The essentialism and emotional rhetoric in Putin's primordialism ethnic nationalism peaks and Putin reproduces Russian historical and religious myths to justify the occupation of Crimea:

"Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus." (*On Annexation of Crimea, 2014*).

We must understand why Putin needs both types of nationalism: ethnonational and imperial, and why he does not go all the way in one of these paths. He reminds that ethnic Russian nationalism was one of the reasons lies behind USSR's dissolution and brought results opposite to the interests of the Russian nation. In this sense, it would be expected that Putin understands he must maintain a more inclusive nationalism to regain dispersed Russian people in non-Russian lands or non-Russian minorities in Russian

Federation. This vision also directs Putin to imperial nationalism. It is imperial because as maintained by Putin sovereignty of other states, such as Ukraine could not be used to detach Russian historical regions (*On Special Military Operation, Feb. 2022*). Russian – Ukrainian relations are not the relations of equals, in line with the Russian perspective. Putin and Russia are ready to ratify the territorial integrity of Ukraine if the country would have continued to be a part of the Russian political and economic influence sphere. Ukrainian territorial integrity is conditional on Russian approval and this means conceiving Ukraine as a vassal state. This is why according to Putin, the cultural and religious unity between two countries is not a partnership of equals. When there is not complete ethnic congruence, common imperial nationalism comes to aid to assert “cultural and religious unity” sustained throughout the history of the Russian Empire. Putin points out that Taras Shevchenko, despite being widely celebrated as the founder of the Ukrainian language, was an author of Russian literature language. He adds that many Ukrainians such as Nikolay Gogol were Russian patriots. For Putin, Ukraine is only a “subculture of great Russian culture” (*Article, 2021*). Putin not only neglects that hybrid identities exist in all empires, and the main cause of hybridity is assimilation and power inequality between the center and the periphery, Putin neglects the fact that not all Ukrainians were part of the Russian Orthodox Church, and some are part of Ukrainian Orthodox or Uniate Churches. The issue of the separation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Moscow Patriarchate in 2019 was regarded as ephemeral by Putin. He claimed that modern nations are not unions of faith parallel with Pobedonostsev’s nation and religion perception. On the contrary, habits and customs related to religion and sects are the moral components of the culture and common culture is an inseparable part of the nation (*Article, 2021*). However, he overlooks that the emergence of new religious authorities could also point to cultural and political divergence.

We must remember these constitute myth-making by Putin, as cultural unity is also a myth as there are episodes of repression of the Ukrainian language in the Russian Empire, and colonization of Ukrainian land by Russian settlers Ukrainian nationalists suggested their distinction based on Cossack tradition already in the 19th century, during which separate Ukrainian literature and historiography developed.

When Putin says what is happening in Ukraine is a threat to Russian identity, memory, language, and furthermore Russian existence, this means it is a threat to Russian imperial identity. It cannot be a threat to Russian ethnic identity.

Putin also takes up the imperial card as a promise of development for Ukrainians. He presents Ukraine not only as a failed, corrupt and kleptocratic country, he means the Ukrainian leaders are incapable of governing it. As a counterfactual, Putin argues, had Ukrainians entered the RF, they would have benefited from vast natural resources, and large-scale industry inherited from the USSR. This is also transmitting an idea that is not real and seems like propaganda as Russia does a lot worse than its potential while having a GDP lower than Italy.

Imperial nationalism is in play when Russia is presented as a country which stands against injustice and which “saves Ukrainians from their unjust rulers”. Putin pretends to agree with the legitimacy of the popular revolt against the Kyiv government in 2013 and 2014, which does not make sense as people has become belligerent against the pro-Russian policies of President Yanukovich. Here, Putin consciously engaged in disinformation, and he seems to do it in order to gain the favor of Ukrainian people who joined the Euromaidan protests. He claimed that the rightful revolution against corrupt Kyiv authorities was stolen by an anti-Russian, fascist junta. He employs a deception technique, saying that the standing of the Russian language has been seriously harmed by a new law despite the law was repealed before the events. Tactical propaganda and disinformation, and imperialist claim that Ukraine being “white Russian man’s burden” aside, Putin seems to reinforce a myth of ethnic unity between Russians and Ukrainian “people”, a point of Russian ethnic nationalism. Putin said Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole” in the article published two years before he decided to invade Ukraine (*Article, 2021*).

The justification for the occupation of Crimea, Donbas, and attempt to take control whole Ukraine in 2022 can be read in Putin’s article. For Putin, Russia’s history is a history of foreign threats. From Stalin to Putin, communists to conservative Russian leaders, the phenomenon of Mongol-Tatar Yoke is used to accumulate Russian nationalism and expansionism. By reminding subjugated era, Russian leaders are making their demand for welfare and life sacrifices legitimate.

“The fragmentation intensified after Batu Khan's devastating invasion, which ravaged many cities, including Kiev. The northeastern part of Rus fell under the control of the Golden Horde but retained limited sovereignty... At a new stage of historical development, both Lithuanian Rus and Moscow Rus could have become the points of attraction and consolidation of the territories of Ancient Rus. It so happened that Moscow became the center of reunification, continuing the tradition of ancient Russian statehood. Moscow princes – the descendants of Prince Alexander Nevsky – cast off the foreign yoke and began gathering the Russian lands.” (Article, 2021).

Just like in history Russian territories are attacked by foreign powers (then Mongol, today NATO) and Putin, representing continuity with Moscow power of Nevsky tries to gather Russian lands. Putin deploys an ethnic nationalist myth to justify current actions. This myth also points to the unity of Kyiv and Moscow people in the ancient period, underlying Putin's ethnic and specifically primordialist understanding of nation. Despite the historical brotherhood between Kyiv and Moscow, it is clear that Moscow has supremacy because it became to center and Kyiv periphery, which shows Putin's deployment of imperial nationalism along with ethnic nationalism.

According to claiming historical narrative of Putin, ancient Rus' cultural centers such as Novgorod or Kyiv dissolved to an extent because it was more democratic and based on trade. Moscow, which was part of Golden Horde for a long time and therefore gained more Horde culture than Rus', especially in state-building. State-building appears as a better virtue than democracy, and Moscow excels in that and therefore deserves to be first among equals.

Putin's history writing is nationalist as it has various references to foreign powers attempting to change Russian identity. Here is an example of how the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth conducted the Polonization of “Russian” territories.

“In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, other processes were unfolding. In the 14th century, Lithuania's ruling elite converted to Catholicism. In the 16th century, it

signed the Union of Lublin with the Kingdom of Poland to form the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Polish Catholic nobility received considerable land holdings and privileges in the territory of Rus. In accordance with the 1596 Union of Brest, part of the western Russian Orthodox clergy submitted to the authority of the Pope. The process of Polonization and Latinization began, ousting Orthodoxy.” (Article, 2021).

Putin's desire to equate the Western bloc with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Cossacks with today's Ukraine is easily understandable if we read further:

“Bohdan Khmelnytsky then made appeals to Moscow, which were considered by the Zemsky Sobor. On 1 October 1653, members of the supreme representative body of the Russian state decided to support their brothers in faith and take them under patronage. In January 1654, the Pereyaslav Council confirmed that decision. Subsequently, the ambassadors of Bohdan Khmelnytsky and Moscow visited dozens of cities, including Kiev, whose populations swore allegiance to the Russian tsar. Incidentally, nothing of the kind happened at the conclusion of the Union of Lublin.”(Article, 2021).

The Bolsheviks and later Soviet leaders are praised by Putin for following a Russian tradition of annexing “ancient Rus’ territories” in Eastern Europe. Bolsheviks’ giving new territories to the new Ukrainian Republic is criticized by Putin. At this point, Putin's triune Russian nation theory deflected and it seems he views “Great Russians” above “other Russians”.

“The leaders of modern Ukraine and their external “patrons” do not miss a chance, however, both inside the country and abroad, to condemn ”the crimes of the Soviet regime,” listing among them events with which neither the CPSU, nor the USSR, let alone modern Russia, have anything to do. At the same time, the

Bolsheviks' efforts to detach from Russia its historical territories are not considered a crime.”(Article, 2021).

Putin's narrative is in fact a revision of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras' view of the USSR. The last years of Gorbachev were fulfilled with the rejection of key historic Soviet policies. The government has symbolically rehabilitated the victims of the Great Terror and other purges. In the end, the Russian public opinion was resentful to any mourning to socialist system. During this period, not only the economy is liberated but also symbols of socialist era was replaced by the figures belong to tsarist period. On the other hand, the sudden and then constant economic collapse of Russia has helped Russian Communist Party turning into serious rival against Yeltsin during the elections of 1996. Putin was a senior politician around Yeltsin who has witnessed radical anti-Soviet years and then a communist surge in the second half of the 1990s. After being president, Putin sought to find an equal stance between liberals and communists. Continuing to use Soviet emblems on army vehicles, reintroducing Soviet Anthem again as national anthem with different lyrics, being careful to not criticize the Soviet foreign policy without giving same or worst examples from Western counterparts, and trying unify Russian history by glorifying Soviet achievements in important ceremonies in which memorials to the Great Patriotic War occupies the most important place in his politics. He usually tried to present positive contributions of the Soviet system for the titular republics ignoring the negative. His life philosophy is “gathering the historical Russian lands” and, in this respect, despite defending the liberal economy, he prefers the Soviet Union to modern Russia. The Soviet Union represents a historical era that Russian territorial unity continued, and criticizes the Soviets only for providing too much autonomy and land for other nations.

In Putin's eyes, the country of Ukraine and the identity of Ukraine can only be acceptable in the frame of acknowledged Russia's leadership that comes from its imperial past unless any kind of requests are denied. Putin's view of Ukraine is not shaped by fraternal feelings around common roots, but by a patronage mentality that sees Ukraine as a hierarchical subordinate of Russia.

“Here I would like to thank the Ukrainian military – and this is 22,000 fully armed servicemen. I would like to thank those Ukrainian service members who refrained from bloodshed and did not smear their uniforms in blood.” (On Annexation of Crimea, 2014)

He gives the impression that the whole Ukrainian army in Crimea deserted, but it was only certain parts of the army who did it because identity in many post-Soviet contexts were still not national or exclusionary, and Ukrainian nationalism was still weak. Some of its former spheres of influence yearn to reunite with it when released because of the imperial attractiveness of Russia according to Putin. The truth is that Ukrainians, perhaps believing in the story of “brotherhood” with Russia, never expected or prepared for Russian incursion and the army was paralyzed.

Putin reiterates at every opportunity that he sees Lenin's granting of broad autonomy to the union republics, which even reserves the right to secede, as a time bomb placed under Russia.

“This immediately raises many questions. The first is really the main one: why was it necessary to appease the nationalists, to satisfy the ceaselessly growing nationalist ambitions on the outskirts of the former empire? What was the point of transferring to the newly, often arbitrarily formed administrative units – the union republics – vast territories that had nothing to do with them? Let me repeat that these territories were transferred along with the population of what was historically Russia.” (On Eastern Ukraine, Feb. 2022).

Putin even goes to such lengths of revisionism attempting to destroy Soviet, post-Soviet, and even world Lefts’ historical myths about October Revolution being a massively participated revolution: The October Revolution was a unique one. Despite unsatisfied, alienated masses from sufferings of World War I and besides other catastrophes that marked the last two decades of the Russian Empire have made it possible, the methodology of the Revolution resembles an ordinary coup. The Bolshevik Party stormed the Provincial Government offices and seized power. Since the Bolsheviks did not come to power based on the will of the popular masses of the Russian Empire of

different nationalities, they initially had to listen to and meet popular wishes. Because the Russian people have wanted peace immediately due to the heavy losses of the World War and the unsustainable agricultural production chain due to recruited millions of peasants for holding collapsing trenches against the German Empire, the sole and certain position of the Bolshevik Party for a ceasefire has eased the establishment of socialist rule in the first few months. However, the USSR was not the product of the Revolution, or the coup simply. The USSR was the result of four years of civil war. That civil war was not only against the former regime's representatives and beneficiaries but also composing reconquest of former territories of the Empire. A number of them have enjoyed independence as Ukraine did. What Putin laments is not Soviet establishing sovereignty over former Russian empire territory but convincing former Soviet republics of their need to share sovereignty with Russia.

The Soviet country has set up as a civil war country. In this sense, for merging the breaking far regions during the civil war and disillusioned Muslim people in Central Asia, whether or not communist ideology requests rights for minorities, the Moscow government had to make large-scale concessions to hold today's near abroad bounding to centre and providing their support or at least their neutrality in their class war affairs. To be lenient against the demands of other nations while being uncompromising against other economic classes than the proletariat was the primary interest of Soviet nationality policy. As a result of this policy, the Soviet Union was able to take many regions that had been separated from the Russian Empire back under the sovereignty of Moscow, as well as to prevent new divisions. In this sense, the Soviet era was an interim period for Russian history, which has stalled the natural process of dissolution of the Russian Empire as other empires experienced following WWI. This makes clear why Putin blames Ukraine for their way of de-Sovietization because he views this as against imperial nationalism.

“At the same time, the Ukrainian authorities – I would like to emphasize this – began by building their statehood on the negation of everything that united us, trying to distort the mentality and historical memory of millions of people, of entire generations living in Ukraine.” (On Eastern Ukraine, Feb. 2022).

4.2.3. Geopolitics of Russian Identity

With the consciousness about long lasting Russian statesmanship tradition and Putin as the last representor of it, this frame is presenting the place Russia occupies in the world and geopolitics in the eyes of Putin. Clarifying his history and nationhood related geopolitical project and agenda is the main purpose of this frame.

Putin's apprehending of international relations is complimentary to his understanding of Russian nationalism. As maintained by him geopolitics and great powers' seeking of power would not permit a real independent Ukraine or real independence for small power for that matter. It is the same reason he did not see the real independence of other former Soviet, Middle Eastern, African, or Latin American countries as impossible. They can exist under the spheres of influence of one or the other. For Putin, the only political entities that could be considered as nation are those which are powerful enough to keep their independence based on their own power. Thus, Putin utterly rejects Western alliance systems such as NATO and the EU where small countries have equal veto power as a sham arguing greater countries have broad influence on them (*Article, 2021*). Putin assesses the independency of Ukraine only by having borders on the map. He dismisses the sovereignty of Ukraine in terms of choosing its own international alliance. During 1991-2013, whenever Ukraine have not acted complying with Russia's interests, it has encountered economic sanctions mostly limiting natural gas transfer. According to Putin, separating Ukraine from Russia is a betrayal to Ukraine itself. Ukraine was always a puppet state of Russia's rivals under corrupted and exploitative regimes in any scenario except being part of the Russian world (*Article, 2021*).

The idea that only major countries have the right to follow sovereign foreign policy contradicts Putin's emphasis that international law should be binding for every country even the strongest, the United States. (*Munich Speech, 2007; On Annexation of Crimea, 2014*). It also contradicts Putin's claim of naivety and rightness of Russia in conducting international affairs (*On Annexation of Crimea, 2014*). Putin endeavors to legitimize illegal moves - violating sovereignty of another country - by mentioning the popular will of the people of Crimea despite the illegality of the move.

Another pretense of Putin for being a follower of international law is the principle of self-determination and separation if Crimea is similar to Ukraine's separation from the USSR. The secession was an absolute right secured by Union Treaty to Ukraine, but Crimea was not a federal unit of independent Ukraine. This emerges as a disinformation point.

“As it declared independence and decided to hold a referendum, the Supreme Council of Crimea referred to the United Nations Charter, which speaks of the right of nations to self-determination. Incidentally, I would like to remind you that when Ukraine seceded from the USSR it did exactly the same thing, almost word for word. Ukraine used this right, yet the residents of Crimea are denied it.” (On Annexation of Crimea, 2014).

The speech on Crimea is the first time Putin blatantly neglects historical facts, without any mitigation and manufactured pretense, instead of trying to make a case for Russia's position in events as was observed in the 2007 Munich Speech or later historical article.

Putin frames Ukraine's approach to NATO and the EU as equal to the Nazi invasion of the USSR, an event the USSR was caught unprepared:

“The USSR was not prepared to counter the invasion by Nazi Germany, which attacked our Motherland on June 22, 1941, without declaring war. The attempt to appease the aggressor ahead of the Great Patriotic War proved to be a mistake which came at a high cost for our people.” (On Special Military Operation, Feb. 2022).

Again, mentioning WWII and the German offensive against the USSR, Putin criticizes the appeasement policy of Stalin to postpone the conflict. Putin says the Russians could not wait at the moment because as the great losses of WWII show, appeasement policy only serves to increase the cost of the victory. The implication is of course that “Ukrainian and Western advances” of violating the Russian “sphere of

influence” must not be appeased. Putin here clearly distorts historical facts and incorporates lies because historians do not allude Soviet losses to any appeasement but the strategic and military weakness of the Soviet army. Several pieces of historical evidence point out the fact that Stalin only seemed to attack Germany by amassing troops and war materials near the border (Suvorov, 1990).

Putin also frames Ukraine’s approach to NATO and the EU as equal to the dissolution of the USSR, an event that the USSR had to face due to weakening.

“In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union grew weaker and subsequently broke apart. That experience should serve as a good lesson for us, because it has shown us that the paralysis of power and will is the first step towards complete degradation and oblivion. We lost confidence for only one moment, but it was enough to disrupt the balance of forces in the world...” (On Special Military Operation, Feb. 2022).

“For the United States and its allies, it is a policy of containing Russia, with obvious geopolitical dividends. For our country, it is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation. This is not an exaggeration; this is a fact. It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty. It is the red line which we have spoken about on numerous occasions. They have crossed it.” (On Special Military Operation, Feb. 2022).

Putin disregards the fact that Ukraine’s distance from the Russian identity is related to the country's finding it more appropriate to join the Western camp rather than being hostile. In this regard, we must say that we do not associate the Russian culture, which has a history of revolts and revolutions, not behind that of France, with autocracy. However, for the countries that lived together with Russia, or rather under Russian domination, the Russian identity has inevitably become synonymous with autocracy and oppression and it is seen as a normal wish to get away from it so that the past sufferings are not repeated.

One of the fundamental premises for Putin when it comes to foreign policy is that Russia is always naive and right. In accordance with Putin, Russia accepts the new power balance after the collapse of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. Russia follows bilateral agreements and acts in compliance with the treaties signed after 1991. The Western actions do not comply with the new rules of the Russo - West relations.

“We are open to cooperation. Foreign companies participate in all our major energy projects. According to different estimates, up to 26 percent of the oil extraction in Russia – and please think about this figure – up to 26 percent of the oil extraction in Russia is done by foreign capital. Try, try to find me a similar example where Russian business participates extensively in key economic sectors in western countries. Such examples do not exist! There are no such examples.”
(Munich Speech, 2007).

This extraction is not about economy or the place of the foreign capital in Russian economy. It is about Russian naivety and Russia's place in the world. Putin admits that he sees Russia and the West as opposing blocs. However, looking at the whole of his speech, it is apprehended that Putin presented Russia as the center that ended the Cold War, as a country that tries to help everyone in trying to reach the democratic world, respects the law, and expects the same respect from other countries.

4.3.4. Summary

In sum, we analyzed how Putin combined imperial and ethnic nationalism as well as geopolitical views to construct Russian identity by focusing on four speeches Putin delivered in significant historical conjunctures and his claiming historical article. Through our analysis, it becomes clear that Russia aims to control territories of Ukraine and Belarus for strategic purposes Russia to increase its geopolitical power and assure energy pipelines to European markets, given its fall from the status of as a military, technological and economic superpower, if not great power. In order to incorporate Ukraine and Belarus in this project and influence the by-stander European and Western public, Putin appeals to ethnic affinities and imperial legacies. Despite the literature about

Russian fear of foreign invasion especially from the West, we believe that Russian assertiveness and nationalism with a written historical perspective is a more important reason for Putin's foreign policy. Through nationalism, Putin also creates coherence in domestic politics and rallies citizens of RF for creating a strong state in Eastern Europe, which will have strategic power over Europe and the Middle East.



CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

The history of the last 400 years of Russia is not only the history of constant struggle with neighbors, embodied in the constant change of borders but also the history of revolts and revolutions, often after costly wars. The word cost is particularly important here. Because the people, which were ruled by different dynasties and regimes settled in Moscow and St. Petersburg, adopted a rebellious attitude to the central administration after almost every major and naturally costly war, whether successful or unsuccessful. The internal turmoil, that started with the abdication of Ivan the Fourth after his endless campaigns, was suppressed with large massacres. The 1768-1774 War, which ended with the separation of Crimea from the Ottoman Empire, was endangered by the peasant revolts supported by the Cossacks and Tatars. Influenced by the West, the Decembrist bureaucracy acted against the Tsar's authority in the 1820s. The events following the defeat in the Japanese War of 1905 only withered away with the constitutional regime. In the end, Russia which suffered the most loss of soldiers in the First World War, just like in the Second War, met communism. All these are proofs that the idea that claims autocracy and totalitarianism are the natural extensions of Russia and Russian modernism could only be achieved by distancing itself (Zlobin, 1996, pp. 72 - 73) is a prejudice. Ironically, Putin acts in a way that feeds Western prejudices that see Russia as an autocratic country. Putin aims to revive the conflict, which was thought to be ideological during the Cold War and which was thought to disappear with the collapse of the Iron Curtain. According to Putin, Russia acts with the mission that history has given it, and stands with its uncompromising unique nature in the face of the corrupt and materialist West.

By the way, it should be noted that, with the exception of the series of events that brought the end of the Soviet Union, almost every situation that created turmoil and radical change in Russia was due to the discontent of the peasants. For example, the 1905 Revolution must have been a revolution triggered by the commercial and industrial

sectors, as the Tsar's authority was limited by the constitution. However, the main reason and factor is not the effort to expand the rights of these classes, but the reaction to the fact that the defeat of Japan shook the authority of the Tsar, as well as the industrialization efforts of Russia based on the transfer of the capital obtained from the agricultural products purchased from the peasants below the market price to the industry. The Stalin regime, which tried to industrialize by ironhandedly similar methods, caused the Holodomor in Ukraine. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, on the other hand, is explained by the fact that the Soviet elites themselves lost their faith in the socialist system when this gigantic state was silently erased from the stage of history compared to its size. In this way, the state apparatus led by the communist party elite remained virtually unresponsive except for the coup attempt led by a narrow clique that was easily suppressed. Therefore, the opinion that the USSR dissolved itself is getting stronger when the Belovezh Accords, signed by the three most prominent and at the same time founder countries of the Union, is accepted as the document that legally ended the USSR.

When it comes to the decision of these three eastern Slavic countries to live separately, it would be appropriate to listen to Putin. As claimed by Putin, Lenin planted a time bomb under Russia by drawing definite borders to the nations of the former Russian empire. This policy of Lenin was so effective that, after the USSR, even a Slavic Union, which would include Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, could not be established. When the only effective way of doing politics in a country governed by a single party was to bring local needs to the fore, the result was the strengthening of national identities. Meanwhile, Russia and the Russians saw themselves as the rulers of the USSR, as revealed in the rhetoric of Stalin, the 1977 Party Program, and Gorbachev's slips. Although Putin accuses the Ukrainian rulers of blaming the USSR on Russia and emphasizes that the Russians are the main victims of the USSR in his rhetoric when the "triune nation" reached the separation agreement, the separation of the Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples from the USSR would be synonymous with leaving Russia. The address for "defending local interests" as the only legitimate policy making opportunity outside the centralized communist rule was Moscow. Moscow has seen itself as Russia. Putin refuses to blame the sins of the USSR on Russia, on the grounds that the Russians are the first victims of the Soviets. However, the place of Russia in the Soviets' politics of nations and, of course, the privileged place of the Russian image in the subconscious mind of the Soviet elites,

which is unveiled from time to time, caused the Soviet peoples identified the negativities they experienced with Russia. For Ukraine, this image is present in all three cases mentioned in this study as the instruments of the Russification of the USSR. While consolidation is the appointment of important positions in titular republics from Moscow, among Russians, industrialization is the 1986 Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Disaster for Ukraine. On the other hand, when collectivization is defined as the forced nationalization of agriculture and the transfer of the surplus value created to industrialization, Ukraine with the Holodomor has been the country most heavily affected by the deadly results of collectivization in accordance with its population. Thus, it is possible to agree with Putin on the argument that the Soviet era alienated the Slavic peoples from each other, although not for the reasons that Putin advocated. Putin has a quarter truth on the idea that the Soviet nationality policy has caused a far separation of “triune nation”. Putin's baseless claim is that Ukraine, and therefore Ukrainians, are inseparable parts of the Russian world. First of all, Moscow's dominance over Ukraine is not eternal, it is not older than, say, the English-Scottish union, and today Scotland is planning to repeat their recent independence referendum of 2014 due to the Brexit has changed everything in politics and economy. Afterwards, as explained in the historical background, it cannot be proven whether the Kievan Rus' State consisted of three Slavic elements or a single Slav element, which was later divided into three. It will remain a primordial approach to claim that in the 11th century, from the Baltic coast to the Black Sea coast, a homogeneous society resembling a nation, not only in terms of ethnicity but also culture and language, has resided. In addition, just as the Baltic coasts, Caucasus, Tatar khanates and Siberia, starting from the Crimea, became the target of Russification as coming under Russian domination, it is an expected result that some of the Russians in Putin's imagination would have been assimilated by the surrounding cultures during the centuries following the Mongol invasion.

What is Putin's role in all this, and why does this study put Putin at the center? Since Ivan IV, Russia has presented a political order dominated by a great prince who has been respectively called the tsar, the emperor, and the general secretary. The great prince is the head of state, and the minor princes are bound by the duty to serve him. During the imperial period, minor princes were represented in the aristocracy and bureaucracy. In Soviet times they became members of the "nomenklatura". With the collapse of the Soviet

Union, they took the name "oligarch". As in the case of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, oligarchs, concentrated mostly in the energy and mining sectors, were left out of the country or in jail when they attempted to make politics encouraged by the enormous wealth they acquired in the 2000s surge of global raw material prices. Thus, another corrupted state Ukraine with an oligarch-dominated economy has a competitive political system even if it is not based on the rule of law (Biletska, 2020, pp. 62, 78), thanks to the oligarchs' rivalry and support of different parties moving away from Russia and getting to Western democracies. In contrast with semi-democratic Ukraine, Putin's absolute authority has been secured on constitutional grounds by the 2020 Referendum.

The term Soviet Empire has been used frequently in the Western world to refer to the oppressive and expansionist tendencies of empires (Suny, 2001, p. 23). Is Russia an empire or does Putin have a vision of an empire? First of all, it is necessary to look at the definition of empire. The European empires of the 18th and 19th centuries, aside from oversea empires in which there was an absolute domination of the center on colonies, were organized in multinational political structures in the form of peripheral lands/states articulated around the center, such as the Austrian, Russian, and Ottoman empires. However, it would not be inclusive to consider empires as states based solely on the domination of one nation/culture over other nations. For instance, although the Roman and Byzantine Empires were states dominated by Latin and Greek cultures respectively, they also experienced dynasties from other ethnicities. However, in these empires, as in the recent empires, the main thing was the dominance of Rome and Constantinople over large lands that were distant and culturally and ethnically foreign to the capital/centre. Thus, when the examples from the ancient period to the Middle Ages and the industrial society period are examined, the definition of empire can be made in the most general way as a form of political control based on hierarchical relations between the metropolis and the periphery (Suny, 2001, p. 26). In our opinion, this definition, which includes the Soviet period, is open to objection particularly for the Soviet Union, considering the investments made by the Soviets in the union republics and the opportunities they provided to them, from women's rights to education. However, it should not be forgotten that the Soviets' efforts to bind the pro-independence regions to themselves are not limited to the change of will / persuasion, but also include the physical elimination of the pro-independence minded politicians. As for present-day Russia, it is clear that this state is

trying to maintain its still vast territory in old-fashioned ways, through the forced domination of the center over the periphery. In this study, Tatarstan's struggle to become a sovereign state was explained. However, the commercial concerns raised by the geographical location of the country limited Tatarstan's demands. For, the industrial infrastructure of Tatarstan was designed in a way that Tatarstan should send its natural resources firstly to Moscow to make money.

Moscow could not have managed its multinational sovereignty area in line with the classical British/French colonial understanding; because Russia was not an oversea empire. Russia had no difficulties in its administration and Russification policies in the underdeveloped and sparsely populated Siberia and Far East regions. In contrast, Russia has encountered with relatively developed societies whose interaction with the West was alive and/or ancient civilizations with deep-rooted historical heritage when it comes to Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. In this way, constant but cautious measures were taken in the Russification of ancient civilizations. According to Tishkov, this is the reason why Russian national consciousness exhibits a different orientation from other nationalizing ethnic elements. Thus, the Russian identity developed in restraint of other nations, and the modern Russian national identity could only be introduced after 1991. However, this possible development was interrupted by the Chechnya Wars. Russian policy repeated the national policies of the Soviet era in Chechnya in terms of logic, if not content. First, the region was re-conquered, then the establishment of a de-facto monarchy in the country was supported so that it would not attempt to separate again. Chechnya, which implemented its own laws, is still heavily funded from the central budget. Thus, the Russian Federation continued the imperial mentality that kept its subordinate nations under its authority by force and then by incentives. In other words, contrary to Putin's rhetoric, there is no situation where other nations entered the Russian sovereignty by their own will.

The Soviet Union, as an intermediate form that delayed the disintegration of Tsarist Russia, maintained the center-periphery relationship of the empires, this time by defining national borders. With this aspect, it ended with a nation-based disintegration, justifying the imperial ascription made by those who found it doomed to disintegrate as a political form that does not belong to our age. The contemporary Russian Federation, on the other hand, approaches the nation-identity-based problems with arrogance it directed

towards the periphery of the imperial center. However, as a result of the declining opportunities compared to the Soviet period and the maturation of the new identities acquired by the parts that broke away from it, the disease that would have been left 100 years behind had it not been for the Soviet interim period, Russia is just suffering the post-imperial syndrome.

While Putin's actions are considered a new colonial concept in the world of academia and media, it is actually a post-imperial syndrome. In this respect, it parallels the inability of France before De-Gaulle to acknowledge its new place in the world. Another disintegrating empire of the same period, Great Britain, emerged from its colonies with little conflict, whereas France did not want to accept that the imperial era was over. France had to leave his colonies that wanted independence, from the Indochina peninsula to Algeria, as a result of bloody wars. After this period, under De-Gaulle, France, which was disturbed by the American hegemony, left NATO for a while, and it is a symptom of the post-imperial syndrome, being equivalent to not adopting its new geopolitical position, as Putin said in his Munich 2007 speech. The difficulty Russia faced compared to France was that the construction of the national state was interrupted in 1917. While France as an overseas empire was in the position of a nation-state on its mainland, it acted as an imperial sovereign in its colonies. Russia, on the other hand, as a territorial empire whose non-Russian lands/peripheries started just beyond the center, was dragged into an identity crisis that it still experiences today, by developing policies emphasizing Russian nationalism on the one hand and imperial supremacy on the other hand for the nations living on the same lands. France and Great Britain had lost their past hegemonic positions in the world, but remained significant world powers. As Putin stated at the 2007 Munich Conference, he complains the most about the unipolar world in foreign policy and is angry that Russia is not taken into account. Like this; the identity problem of Russia, in which nation, empire, and geopolitical interests/conflicts are intertwined, is also reflected in Putin's narratives with all its contradictions, forcing him to give contradictory statements on a three-century-old issue such as the nation and nationality issue a few months apart.

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