Neo-Fascism and the State: The Negotiation of National Identity in Modern Russia

Hanna Baranchuk

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_diss

Recommended Citation
Baranchuk, Hanna, "Neo-Fascism and the State: The Negotiation of National Identity in Modern Russia." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2017. https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_diss/84

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Communication at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
ABSTRACT

The present dissertation is a study of the process of national identity renegotiation in modern Russia. More specifically, I analyze the use of the word *fascism* in contemporary Russian discourse. Developing a blend of Kenneth Burke’s theory of human motives and Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory of the subject, I compare the psycho-rhetorical narratives of the four distinct parties - Vladimir Putin, state-sponsored “anti-fascists” (*Nashi*), independent anti-fascists (*Antifa*), and neo-fascists - which fight over the usage of the word *fascism* in their attempts to renegotiate the meaning of Russianness. While explicating the mechanism of national identity construction, Lacan’s theory, as I argue, does not help distinguish among various visions of the nation. Therefore, I build upon Burke’s classification of symbolic frames (comedy, tragedy, epic, elegy, satire, the burlesque, and the grotesque) to differentiate among alternative fantasy-frames (Lacanian fantasy and Burkean frame) as more or less politically dangerous and ethically sophisticated. As the reading of the four psycho-rhetorical narratives shows, the vision of Russia proposed by Russian neo-fascists dangerously approximates the Russian idea promoted by the state and pro-Putin “anti-fascists.”

INDEX WORDS: Neo-fascism, National identity, Nationalism, Neo-fascists, *Nashi, Antifa, Putin, Russia, Burke, Lacan, Psycho-rhetorical criticism*
NEO-FASCISM AND THE STATE:
THE NEGOTIATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MODERN RUSSIA

by

HANNA BARANCHUK

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
2017
NEO-FASCISM AND THE STATE:
THE NEGOTIATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN MODERN RUSSIA

by

HANNA BARANCHUK

Committee Chair: M. Lane Bruner
Committee:
Mary Stuckey
Angelo Restivo
William Downs

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
May 2017
DEDICATION

To my family and friends, those who are close and those who are afar.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would be impossible without the inexhaustible and invaluable guidance of my dissertation advisor, Professor M. Lane Bruner. I also want to express colossal gratitude to the dissertation committee members for their patience, time and desire to share helpful insights.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ v

1 INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................................... 1

2 THE TRAGICOMEDY OF THE NATION .................................................................................. 19
   2.1 Ideological Criticism as a Psycho-Rhetorical Enterprise ............................................... 20
   2.2 The Two Lacks as the Birthplace of Subjectivity ......................................................... 35
   2.3 The Mirror Stage and the Study of National Identity Construction ....................... 42
   2.4 The Neurotic Structure of National Subjectivity ......................................................... 50
      2.4.1 The Formula of the Subject .................................................................................. 53
   2.5 Fantasy as an Attitude of the National Subject ............................................................ 60
   2.6 The Objet a and Symptoms ......................................................................................... 62
   2.7 Attitude and Fantasy-Frames: A Lacanian-Burkean Ethical Framework ................ 70
   2.8 The Imaginary and the Symbolic Levels of a Psycho-Rhetorical Analysis of the Nation 87
      2.8.1 The Imaginary: A Symptom as a Linguistic Motive ............................................. 90
      2.8.2 The Symbolic: The Objet a as the Ultimate Motive and the Four Discourses ....... 94
   2.9 The Critical Vigor of a Lacanian-Burkean Theory of National Identity Construction .................................................................................................................. 114

3.1 The Rewriting of History as an Ethical Enterprise.......................... 119
3.2 The Russian Idea........................................................................ 128

4 THE TRAGIC NARRATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN NEO-FASCIST MASTER 178
4.1 The Reciprocity of Russian Neo-Fascism and the Russian Idea......... 179
4.2 Fascism, Pathology, Irrationality, and Ethics................................. 191
4.3 The Success and Failure of Russian Neo-Fascism............................... 212
4.4 The Tragic Imagery of Russian Neo-Fascism................................... 222
4.5 The Triumph of the Symbolic Master............................................. 255

5 THE MANY FACES OF TRUE AND PURPORTED ANTI-FASCISM IN
MODERN RUSSIA............................................................................. 267
5.1 Nashi as an Ideological Mouthpiece of the Kremlin.......................... 268
  5.1.1 Nashi’s Tragic “Anti-Fascism”.................................................. 280
  5.1.2 Nashi’s Competitive “Democracy”.............................................. 321
5.2 The Comic National Fantasy of Independent Anti-Fascists (Antifa) as the
  Agent of the Analyst’s Discourse..................................................... 330
5.3 Vladimir Putin’s Russian Idea as a Tragic Response to Actual and
  Perceived Fascism............................................................................ 351

6 CONCLUSION.................................................................................. 372
WORKS CITED.................................................................................. 387
1 INTRODUCTION

On November 4, 2005, for the first time in the history of the country, Russians observed National Unity Day.¹ The holiday was supposed to celebrate “the best features and qualities of the Russian national character,” “traditions of mutual help,” and “sensitivity to the pain and misfortunes of others.”² Yet, the spirit of the holiday was far from a display of compassion, goodness or unity. Instead, National Unity Day was marked by fear and anger triggered by so-called Russian Marches (or Right Marches) – demonstrations organized by neo-fascist, ultranationalist and anti-immigrant activists in major cities in Russia. Major targets of the discontent voiced by organizers and participants of the Russian Marches have been the churki (literally translated as “wooden stubs”), or knuckleheads, as extreme nationalists derogatorily refer to non-Slavic Muslim labor immigrants from former Soviet republics in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Russian republics in the North Caucasus.³

In Moscow more than 2,000 members of ultra-right organizations “marched” from the statue of Griboedov in Chistye Prudy to the Slavic Square, chanting “Russia is against occupants,” “The Russians are coming,” “Russia belongs to us,” “Glory to the Empire,” “Russia is everything, others are nothing,” “Russia is for Russians, Moscow is for Muscovites,” and “Sieg Heil!”⁴ In 2013 the Russian March attracted around 6,000 participants, who openly urged for violent actions against non-Slavic population of Russia.⁵

¹ National Unity Day is “Den’ narodnogo edinstva” in Russian, also known as People’s Unity Day in English.
² In the Russian language the English word “Russian” has two variants: “Russky” means “ethnic Russian;” “Rossiysky” means “something/somebody belonging to, somebody living in the Russian Federation,” not necessarily “ethnic Russian.” In this instance, “Russian” is “Rossiysky.” For more about this holiday, see “Federal Law,” n. pag. In the dissertation all titles of and citations from articles in Russian have been translated by me.
³ Churki is translated by Zarakhovich, “Inside Russia’s Racism Problem,” n. pag.
⁴ In the following years the slogans of the Russian March were similar: in 2007 - “Russians, stand up,” “Russian order or war,” and “Tolerance is AIDS”; in 2008 - “Glory to Russia!” and “Glory to the Russian people!”
At the end of the demonstrations members of the Slavic Union (abbreviated as SS) raised their flag with a stylized swastika. Despite the numerous protests of Russian and foreign journalists, political analysts, human rights activists and experts, the Russian Marches are sanctioned by local authorities in Russian cities year after year. The Russian Marches show that extreme nationalism and neo-fascism as its species are not marginal political phenomena or poorly organized social movements in Russia.

The reaction of the Kremlin to the Russian Marches and other neo-fascist mass rallies is also disturbing. For instance, addressing the violent ethnic clashes in Moscow’s Manezh Square in winter 2010-2011, Vladimir Putin promised to “suppress” any “manifestations of extremism” and offered “seemingly reasonable” solutions to the problem: he suggested “perfecting” excessively liberal registration rules in big cities and also warned that those who migrate “from the North Caucasus must respect local customs, local culture, local traditions and local laws.” Putin, however, did not blame Russian neo-fascists, who had severely beaten non-Slavic passersby, but rebuked non-Slavic immigrants, as well as Russian liberal politicians and other forces opposing the government. Talking about political rallies organized by anyone other than the Kremlin and state-sponsored organizations, Putin noted that those rallies are just pretexts to fight with authorities.

Following Putin, the main Kremlin ideologist, former First Deputy of the Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov, insisted that it was Russian liberal
politicians who were purportedly guilty of the Manezh Square chaos: liberal politicians “have been persistently setting the fashion for unsanctioned public actions, Nazis and cheapskates follow them.”

A slightly different version was presented by Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev, who accused “the radical left youth” of provoking ethnic disturbances on Manezh Square (he apparently referred to Antifa, Russia’s independent anti-fascist youth movement, critical of the Kremlin). Apparently, for Putin and other state officials, the real threat emanates not from Russian neo-fascists but from other “fascists” - Russian liberal politicians and anybody who opposes the political regime in the country.

Growing ethnic violence, the Kremlin’s reluctance to curb fascist-like tendencies in Russia, coupled with the regime’s suspicion of liberal political opposition, suggest that Putin feels more comfortable in the company of extreme nationalists and neo-fascists than supporters of liberal freedoms. While some see the nationalistic inclination of the state as an inconsequential pragmatic, populist step, others, including myself, point out the dangers of such pragmatism. It is true that right-wing extremist movements and parties exist in European countries, as well as in America and virtually everywhere else. The situation in Russia, however, differs significantly from the extreme right in established democracies. Democratic traditions are not deeply rooted in Russia, and the country is not well integrated into major international political alliances. Russia, however, is a key player in the international arena, and to disregard the process of Russian national identity renegotiation under the circumstances - when the

---

9 “Surkov Found ‘Liberal’ Traces” n. pag.
10 “Manezh Square, Nurgaliev Comments” n. pag.
12 For more information about right-wing populist parties and movements in democratically-based countries, see Betz and Immerfall.
government does little to prevent, but, on the contrary, as I will show, systematically promotes ethnic nationalistic ideals - would be unreasonable and dangerous.

Guided by these considerations, I embark on the study of national identity construction in modern Russia by analyzing the use of the word *fascism* in contemporary Russian discourse. Blending Jacques Lacan’s theory of the subject and Kenneth Burke’s theory of human motives, I perform a “psycho-rhetorical” comparative reading of four distinct narratives: national visions held by Russian neo-fascists, state-sponsored “anti-fascists” (*Nashi*), independent anti-fascists (*Antifa*) and Putin, who all fight over the usage of the word *fascism* in their attempts to renegotiate the meaning of Russianness.13

I am drawn to this study that takes on neo-fascism as a form of the extreme right for several reasons. First, it is arguably important to understand manifestations of extreme nationalism in modern Russia. Just like, for instance, in prefascist Italy, a popular sentiment in modern Russia is that of reactive, aggrieved or injured nationalism, defined as “a form of generic ingroup sentiment exacerbated by a real or fancied sense of protracted humiliation on the part of a political and/or ethnic community that is, or imagines itself to be, the object of abuse at the hands of others.”14 While the situation in contemporary Russia may remind us of social and economic tensions in prefascist Germany and Italy, social and economic calamities do not necessarily lead to the rise of fascism in a country.15 Although Russians may favor a strong government, the memories of personality cults, Stalinist repressions, as well as the Nazi invasion of the USSR are still strong. Indeed, there are only a few explicitly neo-fascist organizations in

---

13 What I refer to as a psycho-rhetorical reading is a close textual analysis performed through the prism of Lacan’s and Burke’s theories. Each of the two theories can be considered as psycho-rhetorical since they both engage the unconscious, which is structured like language, and conscious manifestations of inner psychic processes in speech.

14 Gregor 31-32.

15 See Parland; Laqueur.
Russia, and just like the Black Hundred in tsarist Russia (officially known as the Union of the Russian People), they are not fascist in a classic sense. They are mostly xenophobic, chauvinistic, racist, anti-Semitic, and supportive of the Russian Orthodox Church and a strong government. As I show in Chapter Three, to fully understand why these sentiments are characteristic of Russian neo-fascism, one needs to consider how major historical events - from the summoning of the Varangian princes to help build the first Russian state, Kievan Rus, to the break-up of the Soviet Union - shaped the way the Russians think about themselves and others.

Second, while neo-fascism in the country has acquired a specific, not a “classic” fascist, form, the terms “fascist” and “anti-fascist” are widely, if not always coherently, used in modern Russian public and political discourse. The term “fascism,” at first sight, elicits a univocal response: as early as in elementary school Russian children are taught about the dangers and consequences of fascism.

Yet, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, “fighting with fascism” acquired a meaning other than “resisting the Nazi invasion.” It has been used in Russian public discourse both as an accusation against those who discriminate against ethnic Russians (for example, the Estonian government, which decided to relocate a Soviet World War II memorial - the Bronze Soldier - from the center of Tallinn to a military cemetery), as well as a form of self-defensive behavior.

---

16 See Andreas Umland, “Concepts of Fascism in Contemporary Russian and the West.”
17 In elementary school (grades 1-4) children are told about major events in Russian history, including the Great Patriotic War only in a nutshell (WWII is often discussed as the “Great Patriotic War” in the Russian context). More in-depth information is provided in secondary (grades 5-9) and high (grades 10-11) school (a detailed study of WWII is conducted in the ninth grade). Russian history lesson plans and other information about history lessons in Russian schools can be found at <http://school10.rc-buzuluk.ru/mo_ped/istoria.htm> (in Russian); <http://prosv.ru/ebooks/Bogolubov_Obshestvoznanie_6kl/0.html> (in Russian).
(for example, neo-fascists claim that their actions are required to save ethnic Russians from their enemies).  

Understanding the significance and uniqueness of Russian ethnic nationalism, I explore national narratives of Putin, pro-Putin “anti-fascists” (Nashi), independent anti-fascists (Antifa) and neo-fascists to see what they reveal about the process of national identity construction in contemporary Russia from an ethical perspective. As a result of the ethical critique of nationalisms in Russia, I explain why, on the one hand, most Russians are proud of their country’s anti-fascist, multicultural past, but, on the other hand, why incidents of national/ethnic intolerance and extreme ethnic nationalism are on the rise. More specifically, building upon Burke’s classification of frames and Lacan’s four Discourses, which I explicate in detail in Chapter Two, I differentiate among alternative national fantasies as less or more politically dangerous and ethically sophisticated.

Joining the discussion on national identity renegotiation and extreme expressions of hatred, I explore areas of significant overlap between Burke’s and Lacan’s theories in Chapter Two and argue that, by bringing them together, they create a potent framework for the study of national identity construction. The proposed psycho-rhetorical analysis of national identity construction in Russia aims to contribute to the body of literature at the junction of contemporary rhetorical theory, the Lacanian theory of subjectivity and collective identity, as well as to a larger pool of works on national identity construction.

The problem of national identity building has been more often examined in psychological rather than psychoanalytic literature. As proponents of social psychological views on nationalism

18 For foundational documents of major neo-fascist organizations, see “DPNI Organization Chapter,” n. pag.; Demushkin, “Russian Nationalism” n. pag.
19 When reading Putin’s psycho-rhetorical narratives of the Russian nation I focus on both President Putin’s and former President Medvedev’s rhetoric, since the latter during his presidential career did not express ideas different from Putin’s views.
argue, emotions constitute a key psychological dimension of social relations, while relationships are seen as social aspects of emotions.\textsuperscript{20} To understand the power of nationalism (including neo-fascism), they maintain, is to understand how national identity is formed on the basis of emotions and the irrational. However, links between individual and collective (e.g., national) identities in social psychology are not firmly established. Psychoanalysis, conversely, helps to connect the individual and the social.\textsuperscript{21} As Herbet Marcuse argues, psychoanalysis is already social: the foundation of the self is in “fundamental relatedness to reality, [a] libidinal cathexis of the objective world.”\textsuperscript{22}

Resisting the major limitations of psychological and some psychoanalytic accounts of the collective subject, Lacan’s theory of intersubjectivity has been more often applied to the study of national identity negotiation. Unlike Freud’s psychoanalytic approach, which has been charged with reducing the social to the individual, the Lacanian theory of subjectivity, although greatly indebted to Freud’s scholarship, resists such charges. Lacan’s theory is founded on the concept of intersubjectivity. Simply put, subjectivity is understood as an outcome of affectively driven and unconsciously structured interactions between the self and the other. Lacan’s intersubjectivity is especially prominent in attempts to explicate national identity construction: the national subject never equals the ideal national self and therefore is constitutively dependent on an image of the national other.

Despite Burke’s objection to “an essentializing mode of [Freudian] interpretation,” or the tendency of Freudian psychoanalysis to reduce complex behavior to its libidinal components, as well as Burke’s warning against the inclination of psychoanalysis to consider any non-libidinal

---

\textsuperscript{20} On various social psychological views on nationalism, see Searle-White; Scheff; Langman; Dekker, et al.; Houghton; Ross.

\textsuperscript{21} On psychoanalysis and nationalism, see Salecl, “Nationalism”; Brunner, “Pride and Memory”; Falk; Stavrakakis; Stavrakakis and Chrysoloras.

\textsuperscript{22} Marcuse as cited in Eli Zaretsky 206.
interpretation of human motives as deceptive rationalization (after all, “any set of motives is but part of a larger implicit or explicit rationalization regarding human purpose as a whole”), Burke does not consider himself anti-Freudian. Instead, he sees a great potential in psychoanalysis, calling to revise Freud’s theory and to create “an over-all theory of drama itself.”

Drawing important parallels between Burke’s and Lacan’s theories, I zoom in on the utility of Burke’s attitude toward history understood as “[one’s] notion of the universe or history” by which “a thinking man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it.” To give the concept of attitude a Lacanian twist, it is possible to say that I focus on fantasy/attitude as the symbolic history of the subject’s desire for unity. Similar to Burkean attitude, Lacanian fantasy is a fundamental structure of desire by means of which the subject explains what it is. The Lacanian desire to fill in identity lack or the constitutive void, to put it in Burke’s terms, is “the ultimate motive behind our acts.”

Just as Benedict Anderson’s concept of the nation as an imagined community must be distinguished from fictitious mental creations, Lacan’s fantasy and Burke’s attitude as reality structure must be differentiated from fantasies as conceived in Ernest Bormann’s symbolic convergence theory. Bormann is interested in how the process of fantasy-making “[serves] to sustain the members’ sense of community, to impel them strongly to action…, and to provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions and attitudes.” Although, defined as such, Bormann’s fantasy may seem to coincide with Lacan’s concept, Bormann’s

---

23 Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form 261, 291; Burke, Permanence and Change 26.
24 Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form 291.
25 Burke, Attitudes Toward History 3, 5.
26 Burke, Permanence and Change 222.
27 Bormann, “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision” 398. Bormann’s fantasy is “the creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need….Rhetorical fantasies may include fanciful and fictitious scripts of imaginary characters, but they often deal with things that have actually happened to members of the community or that are reported in authenticated works of history, in the news media, or in the oral history and folklore of the group.” Bormann, The Force of Fantasy 5.
interest lies in a strictly conscious process of mythmaking. Through the prism of Lacan’s theory of the subject, Bormann “[approaches] the function of speech in analysis from its least rewarding angle, that of ‘empty’ speech in which the subject seems to speak in vain about someone who…will never join him in the assumption of his desire.”\textsuperscript{28} By limiting himself to a reading of conscious or egocentric fantasies, Bormann focuses on an image of someone who the collective subject wants to be. Such analysis of imaginary longing does not “[aim] at, [and does not form], the truth such as it becomes established in the [unconscious] recognition of one person of another.”\textsuperscript{29} In other words, Bormann’s symbolic convergence theory is merely descriptive of the social subject and its social reality. Alternatively, having armed oneself with a blended Lacanian-Burkean theory of the subject, one can explain the mechanism of national identity construction as a never ending process of covering “an originary and insurmountable lack of identity” and, more importantly, to evaluate distinct national ideas qua desire for unity.\textsuperscript{30}

Desire, however, is not readily available for exploration, for it is pushed far into the unconscious. That said, in order to approach the repressed desire for unity qua fantasy/attitude, one has to start a psycho-rhetorical reading of a national narrative on the conscious level of speech: “The only object that is within the analyst’s reach is the imaginary relation that links him to the subject ego; and although he cannot eliminate it, he can use it to adjust the receptivity of his ears” to the unconscious.\textsuperscript{31} Desire silts in the conscious and congeals in symptoms. The latter takes forms of both an image of the ideal national self and an image of the national other required to sustain the former.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{28} Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 211.
\textsuperscript{29} Lacan, Seminar, Book I 107.
\textsuperscript{30} Laclau and Zac 3.
\textsuperscript{31} Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 211.
\end{flushright}
Lacan’s theory, however, does not provide the analyst with a framework for symptomatic reading, perhaps owing to Lacan’s injunction to not interpret the metaphor of symptom. After all it is nothing but the subject’s lack. At this point I propose to borrow Burke’s tragic, comic, satiric, epic, elegiac, burlesque, and grotesque frames as specific iterations of fantasy/attitude which lend themselves for symptomatic readings of national narratives. Burke’s frames, however, are not totally imaginary concepts. Although being symptomatic and thus conscious iterations of fantasy or attitude, frames reveal the truth, or the ethics, of the national subject; they allow differentiating between two modes of the subject’s constitutive intersubjectivity – mourning and melancholy. Developing a blend of Burke’s theory of human motives and Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory of the subject, I therefore supplement it in Chapter Two with Sigmund Freud’s concepts of mourning and melancholy. When discussing tragic and comic frames as competing psycho-rhetorical visions of the nation, I note the theoretical proximity between mourning as the attitude of loss and tragedy, on the one hand, and melancholy as the attitude of lack and comedy, on the other.

The tragic frame as always sacrificial requires to get rid of, to kill, the enemy. When a comic frame is adopted, one does not view the other as the enemy who needs to be symbolically or physically sacrificed, but as an uneasy reminder that the nation is always imperfect or lacking. As we shall see, Slavoj Žižek’s concept of the tragic complements the Burkean tragic frame. As Žižek explains, a collective fantasy acquires a tragic dimension when it “takes itself literally,” without acknowledging the insurmountable gap between “the people” and how they collectively fantasize about themselves.32

An observation that tragic mourning is paranoiac through and through brings attention to Lacan’s extensive work on paranoia. The national other always seems to be enjoying itself better,

32 Žižek, “Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself” 203; Žižek, “All’s Well That Ends Well?” 187-188.
because it has taken away what should rightfully belong to the national self. For example, the Russians like to think about themselves as a powerful, intellectually and spiritually superior nation. However, there are always those - immigrants from the North Caucasus or the U.S. government - who, in the eyes of the Russians, have managed to steal what the Russians want, be that economic well-being (one of the common sentiments among the Russians is that illegal labor immigrants earn more than local Russians) or world great power status. Thus, Lacan’s conceptualization of paranoia as “the dialectic of jealousy” and suspicion of the other’s enjoyment enriches my theorizing about the attitude of tragic mourning and lends a psychoanalytic insight in a more general discussion of the paranoid style.

The ultimate attitude of “humane enlightenment,” or comedy, translates transgressions from the category of mourning loss, or “the positivization of a void or lack,” into the category of melancholic lack.\(^\text{33}\) To move from tragic mourning to melancholic lack, one must not seek for a perfect object or state that would grant oneself the pleasure of a complete, or ideal, sense of the self, but maintain an attitude of lack. This comic melancholy is what Lacan presents as the ethical maxim ne pas céder sur son désir (“do not give way on your desire”), or, to borrow Alenka Zupančič’s term, “heroism of the lack.”\(^\text{34}\) Put otherwise, subsumed by the insatiable urge to enjoy national identity fullness, people must not compromise their desire by entertaining a surrogate fantasy of the national self, since by humiliating or expelling the national enemy from their otherwise perfect national fantasy, they still cannot recover what is not lost in the first place. The attitude of comic melancholy, on the contrary, allows the national self to traverse

\(^{33}\) Burke, Attitudes Toward History 41.
\(^{34}\) Zupančič 170. It is important to distinguish between comic and tragic frames, on the one hand, and comic melancholy and tragic mourning, on the other hand. Frames, among which are also epic, elegy, satire, the burlesque and the grotesque, are conscious or symptomatic manifestations of intersubjectivity. Comic melancholy and tragic mourning are the two normative poles that organize both Lacan’s and Burke’s theories of ethics.
national fantasy, to confront the lack of the national subject.\textsuperscript{35} Pushing the limits of national fantasy is not to remind oneself that the national self is just a fantasy. Instead, to push the limits of national fantasy is to establish a healthy balance between oneself and the external world.

This is precisely the mechanism of patriotic identification with the nation as love for one’s people and land, “without putting them above others or implicitly devaluing other people and nation.”\textsuperscript{36} Such “constitutional patriotism,” or, to rehash Jürgen Habermas’ term from a Lacanian perspective, patriotic fantasy/attitude constitutive of the ethically responsible national subject, “sharpens an awareness of the multiplicity and integrity of the different forms of life which coexist in a multicultural society.”\textsuperscript{37} Unlike ethically driven patriotism, jingoistic and xenophobic fantasies are sacrificial, aggressive, and ruthless in their attempts to defend the nation’s superiority, or lack of lack. Therefore, the fantasy of tragic mourning as a typical feature of extreme nationalist rhetoric is the most hazardous, and the fantasy of comic melancholy as a characteristic of patriotic discourse is the most progressive.

With the comic and tragic national fantasies as the most discernible expressions of ethically animated and ethically exhausted national rhetoric respectively, the remaining frames of epic, elegy, satire, burlesque and grotesque can be said to move along an ethnic-civic nationalist continuum. An epic frame that “enables the humble man to share the worth of the hero” may easily transform into an extreme nationalistic attitude: when the “balance between humility and self-glorification” is lost, the heroic national self can no longer see flaws in itself, since it can no longer differentiate between itself and an ideal of the god-like hero.\textsuperscript{38} The elegiac frame of “ironic humility” or ironic awareness of one’s own lack is another comic device. Yet elegy

\textsuperscript{35} See Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology; Boucher, Glynos, and Sharpe.
\textsuperscript{36} Blank 535-536.
\textsuperscript{37} Habermas, “Citizenship and National Identity” 27.
\textsuperscript{38} Burke, Attitudes Toward History 36-37.
becomes tragic - a property of extreme nationalist rhetoric - when the emphasis on the nation’s redemptive suffering is replaced with the focus on the divinity of the weak national self and the evil of the mighty national other.39

When neither an unequivocally tragic nor comic resolution is possible or desirable, the national fantasy can be structured within the frames of satire, the burlesque and the grotesque. While Burke regards satire as exclusively comic and the burlesque as tragic, by saying that “satire is universal, but burlesque is factional,” I suggest that the satiric and burlesque frames contain both comic or tragic impulses, just as Horatian satire is traditionally differentiated from the Juvenalian type.40 In addition, on occasion exhibiting an uneasy confluence of a tragic attack on mistakes of the national other and a comic inventory of limitations of the national self, satire becomes a space of “strategic ambiguity,” where the national subject shares the evils attributed to the national other.41 In a similar fashion, the burlesque can be said to function as an amusing absurdity or a heartless caricature. When the national other is welcomed in its candid incongruity or rejected completely or in part as unsympathetically bizarre, it becomes an object of the comic or tragic grotesque respectively.

The concept of frame as a conscious narrative and its underlying unconscious truth attunes the rhetorical critic to an indirect “transaudition of the unconscious.”42 As a psycho-rhetorical reading of national fantasies continues on the level of the Symbolic as a vicarious inquiry into the unconscious, I solicit help from Lacan’s theory of the four Discourses. Lacan’s discourses of the Master, the University, the Hysteric and the Analyst are permutations of the fundamental structure of desire, which animates fantasy/attitude.

39 Burke, Attitudes Toward History 48.
40 Burke, On Human Nature 77. On Horatian and Juvenalian types of satire, see Freudenburg.
41 Burke, Attitudes Toward History 49.
42 Lacan, Écrits 211.
Attention to the four Discourses helps to explain how frames adopted by Putin, *Nashi*, *Antifa*, and neo-fascists fit in a larger socio-political context. A symptomatic reading of the national frames of Putin, *Nashi*, and neo-fascists reveals that they are, ethically speaking, at odds with the dominant socio-political order of liberal democracy (and with Russia’s anti-fascist history). Conversely, *Antifa’s* national vision challenges ideas of the capitalist free market economy associated with the dominant democratic order. An analysis of the four discursive structures illuminates a structure of opportunities for the national subject to maneuver in the dominant symbolic order that denounces its symptomatic expressions.

From this theoretical angle, the Four Discourses are to be understood as strategic positions from which the national subject performs its symptoms. In light of the widening ideological gap between Russia and the West (i.e., the U.S. and countries of Western Europe) a consideration of the four Discourses permits us to see how Russian neo-fascists, Putin, *Nashi*, *Antifa* and sustain those national visions (as deceptively stable images of the national self and the national other) that turn out to be in stark opposition to the dominant symbolic order of liberal democracy and neoliberal rationality that underlies, or, as some point out, erodes the former.

From the position of the true believer of the Master’s Discourse the national subject that conceives of the ideal self by suppressing the very truth of its desire does not seek absolution for its tragic sacrifice. Considering the modern globalized context, there is virtually no national subject who performs the Master’s discourse unconditionally: even the radically tragic North Korea prefers an official name of the *Democratic* People’s Republic of Korea; similarly, the extremist Islamic State group arguably justly fights the dominant Western ideology for its

---

43 Since the four Discourses are symbolic structures of desire that constitute the national subject unwittingly, what I mean here by strategic position corresponds with a notion of unconscious action, or psychoanalytic act. See Lacan, *Seminar, Book XV*.

44 See Dean; Hardt and Negri; Harvey; Riedner and Mahoney.
purportedly natural or God-given right to be.\textsuperscript{45} Stated otherwise, even radically tragic national visions are enunciated hypocritically under the aegis of supposedly comic mourning.

Whereas the national subject of the Master’s Discourse seeks no justification for enjoying the perfect national self, the national subject as the agent of the University’s Discourse relies on supposedly disengaged knowledge or “facts” that affirm its national image.\textsuperscript{46} In Chapter Two I discuss two forms of the Discourse of the University – the discourse of democracy and the discourse of bureaucracy. While these two discourses have forms that gravitate toward both poles of the Lacanian-Burkean ethical continuum – comic melancholy and tragic mourning respectively, they draw their authority from supposedly objective and universal knowledge. Claims to the objective and the universal do not necessarily prohibit the national subject in its democratic or bureaucratic functions from participating in politically vocal and ideologically inspired narratives. When, however, the national bureaucrat adopts a cynical attitude, he/she exchanges the discourse of the University for the Discourse of the Hysteric in its obsessive form. The latter is a radically tragic attempt of the national subject at securing its identity fullness by ritually engaging in practices that the national subject does not believe in.

The national revolutionary, or the national subject of the Hysteric’s Discourse proper, is in a constant fight with the national other whose values are deemed incompatible with the ideal national self. Considering the symbolic, or performative, positions of North Korea and the Islamic State, one can discuss them either within the discourse of the obsessive or the discourse of the hysteric depending on what is in focus: cynicism or incompatibility of the national subject with the ethical vision promoted by the dominant symbolic order.

\textsuperscript{45} See Gowrinathan.
\textsuperscript{46} I capitalize Lacan’s original four discourses, while all derivative discourses as theorized by others, such as the discourse of bureaucracy, the discourse of democracy, the discourse of the obsessive and the discourse of the hysteric, begin with small letters. This also allows differentiating between the discourse of the hysteric as one of the dialects of the Hysteric’s Discourse proper.
Unlike the revolutionary subject, the national subject of the Analyst’s Discourse does not invest recklessly in any image of the national self conceived as final and necessary. Maintaining the melancholic mode of desire, the psychoanalytic national subject positions itself in a visible, or critical, proximity to the national other. This is a position taken by, for example, Antifa, who confront the national tragic mourning upheld in neo-fascist and capitalist circles.

As I will explain more rigorously in Chapter Two, methodologically the dissertation is an instance of ideological psycho-rhetorical criticism, in which the unit of analysis (traces of ideology in the case studies) is a national fantasy of each of the parties: Putin, Nashi, Antifa, and neo-fascists. Generally speaking, the goal of ideological rhetorical criticism is not to dismantle the very structure that supports the subject’s identity and holds society together; instead, it is just as in psychoanalysis: the end of analysis is neither to help one to adapt to society better, to become a happier person, nor to remove neurotic symptoms, because removed symptoms will be replaced by new symptoms, but to bestow responsibility on the subject for the way he/she enjoys his/her desire. Ideological criticism aims to show how national fantasy is being structured, why it is structured in a particular way (in Sonja Foss’s words, to identify the interests the ideology serves and to uncover strategies used to promote an ideology) and how to push the limits of national fantasy.47

In subsequent chapters I engage in a psycho-rhetorical reading of the narratives of the four parties by looking at the Imaginary and the Symbolic dimensions of their national fantasies. Stated briefly, I analyze how Russian neo-fascists (Chapter Four), Nashi, Antifa, and Putin (Chapter Five) view Russia and Russia’s enemies by strategically placing the images about the past, present and future national self and the national other in certain symbolic positions that presumably confirm those appeals to perfect national selves.

47 See Foss, Rhetorical Criticism.
Having provided in Chapter Three a “disengaged” account of, to borrow Friedrich Nietzsche’s concepts, antiquarian and monumental histories of the Russian national idea, or, said otherwise, having explored the material and symbolic historical context of the upcoming case studies, in Chapter Four I discuss the national vision of neo-fascist groups such as the banned Slavic Union (SS), the extreme nationalist Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) and the extreme nationalist, Orthodox and monarchist Russian Imperial Movement (RIM), specifically how they negotiated their relationship with state officials during their Russian Marches between 2005-2011 and the racial riots on Manezh Square in December 2010.

Chapter Five is dedicated to the discussion of the pro-Putin youth “democratic anti-fascist” movement Nashi, their campaigns against “fascist states” and “fascists” - Estonia, Georgia, Ukraine, Great Britain, the U.S., Russian liberal politicians, human rights advocates and journalists - as well as Nashi’s alternative Russian Marches. Self-described “anti-fascists,” Nashi activists struggle with any expressions of “fascism” in Russia and abroad, which actually boils down to a “fight against the unnatural unity of oligarchs and liberals, who aspire to strip Russia of its independence, similar to the ‘Orange Revolution’ scenario in Georgia and Ukraine.”

The “democratic” and “anti-fascist” Nashi movement often engages in hostile, intolerant and aggressive behavior in its fight against “fascists” - anybody or any country whose political actions supposedly anger the Kremlin.

Next In Chapter Five I focus on Antifa and a series of Antifa’s rallies organized to protest the state’s hostile attitude toward their organization. Unlike Nashi, Antifa “does not cooperate with any state bodies, political parties or repressive units” and supports democracy, liberalism, anarchism, anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, green anarchism, and Trotskyism.

---

48 “About the Project” n. pag.
Chapter Five ends with a reading of Putin’s psycho-rhetorical narrative in relation to neo-fascists, *Nashi, Antifa* and the events discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

As the findings of my psycho-rhetorical reading of the four national narratives, as well as the implications of the symbolic history of the Russian idea, will show, the multiethnic make-up of the Russian Federation, the large ethnic Russian diaspora in the former Soviet republics, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about political, social, economic instability and uncertainty, aggravated the sense of Russian national inferiority and became defining factors in the development of extreme nationalistic sentiments since the breakup of the Soviet Union. Extreme ethnic nationalism in its neo-fascist form promises to fill in the spiritual and political void, to save and restore the country. And this situation in Russia, where the national imaginary is being structured in a predominantly tragic way under the false labels of “anti-fascism” and “democracy,” as will be evident from the reading of Putin’s and *Nashi’s* rhetoric, or the idea of fascism as necessary defensive label to be used against anti-Russian forces, as it transpires in the rhetoric of Russian neo-fascists, is profoundly disturbing when considering the types of political action such tragic perspectives promote.
2 THE TRAGICOMEDY OF THE NATION

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. Having earlier introduced my work as an ethical critique of the deployment of nationalisms in Russia, I first seek to establish the theoretical and analytical value of the present study as an instance of Lacanian-Burkean ideological criticism. By bringing Lacan’s and Burke’s accounts of subjectivity production in proximity to one another, I navigate between the claims that underrate the utility of Lacan’s psychoanalysis as a poststructural theory for ideologically motivated rhetorical criticism and the arguments that cast doubt on the potency of Burke’s theory of motives necessary for a rigorous poststructural research agenda.

Next, I lay out a methodological foundation for the upcoming ideological reading of four distinct psycho-rhetorical narratives of Russianness, each bound by its idiosyncratic employment of the word “fascism.” More precisely, I focus on Lacan’s fantasy and Burke’s attitude, which are both instrumental in understanding the national subjects’ modes of enjoyment. National fantasy/attitude is a dialectic of national savoir and national connaissance (or rather méconnaissance), in other words, of the Symbolic as unconscious knowledge, or differential articulations constitutive of the national subject, and the Imaginary as conscious knowledge, or a constitutive effect of the Symbolic.¹ Since the truth about desire for unity is rejected from the conscious, imaginary knowledge (connaissance) that the national subject has of the national

¹ Both French words savoir and connaissance are translated into English as “knowledge.” For Lacan savoir stands for unconscious, symbolic knowledge and how the unconscious functions; and connaissance is a conscious idea of the self, which is always a misrecognition of the self, méconnaissance. Both savoir and méconnaissance are simultaneously epistemological and ontological concepts, while the dialectic of savoir and mé/connaissance carries ethical significance. When I capitalize the terms the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, I refer strictly to the Lacanian notions of the three orders of psychical experience. In all other cases I employ the terms in a Burkean fashion. If the words real, imaginary, and symbolic are used as adjectives, whether they are a part of Lacan’s and Burke’s terminology is a matter of context.
other and the national self, connaissance is rather méconnaissance - an unredeemable misunderstanding of the national self.

Although the notion of national fantasy/attitude permits us to distinguish between tragic mourning and comic melancholy as two ethical positions toward the national other and thereby the national self, I push even further in pursuit of a blended Lacanian-Burkean theory of nationhood. More specifically, I join Burke’s explication of alternative frames (content-specific narratives of the national subject’s attitude toward the national other and the self) with Lacan’s elaboration of the four Discourses (positions from which the national subject performs its frames) to propose a compound framework for an ethically robust and politically animated discussion of national identity renegotiation.

2.1 Ideological Criticism as a Psycho-Rhetorical Enterprise

While offering to combine psychoanalysis and rhetoric for the purposes of an ideologically driven reading of national narratives, I must acknowledge that some question the value of Lacan’s psychoanalysis for rhetorical criticism. As Cloud asserts in her article “The Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron,” poststructural theories (with Lacan’s psychoanalysis being one of them) emerged as “an antidote to traditional rhetoric’s...search for certitude” and thus are incompatible with a politically charged rhetorical criticism.² A poststructural preoccupation with the world of words, rather than the world of things, is often taken to mean that the discursive alone is what matters. Such commitment to the discursive causes some to denounce poststructural theories as unredeemably idealist. A related proposition that reality is constructed discursively without any relation to the non-discursive, and therefore lacks a

² McKerrow 76.
transcendental reference point, is regarded as an affirmation of radical contingency. Unconditional reliance on the contingent in its turn supposedly challenges the normative strength needed for vigorous criticism of ideology, leaving it relativist.

The implications of the poststructural influence for rhetorical criticism are arguably crippling. “Textual obsession” in contemporary rhetorical studies, in Thomas B. Farrell’s words, aestheticizes rhetoric.³ Postmodern rhetorical criticism is supposedly apolitical since, as Cloud affirms, it is idealist.⁴ Focusing solely on the discursive without considering its material context - supposedly extra-discursive economic or physical forces - the idealist critical project loses its demystifying power. Instead of uncovering material motives obscured by specific ideologies, Cloud insists, postmodern critics do no more than simply describe “competing reality definitions that are unfixed, free-floating and malleable regardless of the material circumstances in which one finds oneself.”⁵ Stated differently, textually-driven ideological criticism is supposedly a pointless exercise.

Poststructural rhetorical criticism is also arguably apolitical because it is anti-realist. When theoretical detachment from material context is taken to the extreme - to mean either that there is nothing but and beyond the discursive reality, or, stated less radically, that nothing but contingent discursively produced reality matters, poststructuralist theories also come to lack normative vigor. In response to Raymie E. McKeown’s nominalist and radically contingent conceptualization of rhetorical theory and practice, critical rhetoric, Robert Hariman justly points out that the position of the writer of critical rhetoric is a position of “a disembodied thinker

³ Farrell 148.
⁴ A postmodern movement in philosophy and criticism embraces a large number of theories and approaches to the study of human condition, including poststructuralism. Postmodernists question the modernist belief in certainty and power of human agency, subjectivity, rationality, and truth; and poststructuralists specifically focus on the differential logic of language when addressing those concerns.
having no identifiable social location, writing in an impersonal style.” As a result of this position, rhetorical critics are unable to make political choices - to favor this or that competing ideological narrative.

Being supposedly useless (descriptive) and inadequate (disinterested), such critical practice, Hariman asserts, is also outright dangerous:

[I]magine someone standing before an El Salvadorean interrogator appealing to the universality of human rights, only to be told, by someone well schooled in critical rhetoric, that “human rights” were but another set of power relations, that universal standards were but names for matters of opinion, and that there was no contradiction between commitments to truth and practices of torture as all were polysemic performances.

Responding to this critique, McKerrow emphasizes Michel Foucault’s principle of “non-privilege” at the root of critical rhetoric - the principle that does not preclude the critic from taking a politically meaningful stance.

Finally, the poststructural critical project is purportedly apolitical also because it lacks the mobilizing force required of rhetorical criticism to be a potentially transformative act. Maurice Charland proposes to equip critical rhetoric with an opportunity to “[engage] in an ongoing struggle against the oppressive formations of power specific to [the critics’] own context.” In other words, rhetorical criticism must also propel political activism. However, depleted by idealist and relativist propositions, the poststructural rhetorical criticism, in Cloud’s and Farrell’s views, is deceptively liberating. As long as writers of rhetorical criticism focus on

---

6 Hariman 68.
7 Hariman 68.
8 McKerrow 76.
9 Charland, “Finding a Horizon and Telosm” 71.
the material effects of discourse instead of focusing on non-discursive materiality, they supposedly engage in “‘mere talk’” rather than in true transformative, emancipatory action: “textuality has had the effect of blinding many of us to...the places where real material grievances are stored and sometimes lost.”

While Cloud, on the one hand, does not see much use in poststructural theories (and by extension, in Lacan’s psychoanalysis) for the purposes of politically viable rhetorical criticism, Christian Lundberg, on the other, points out the inability of traditional rhetorical theories (including Burke’s theory of human motives) to engage in rigorous rhetorical criticism. Lundberg prefers Lacan’s psychoanalysis to Burke’s theory as he opposes Lacan’s preoccupation with formal logic constitutive of discourse (savoir) to Burke’s supposed commitment to the study of particular manifestations of this logic (mé/connaissance). More specifically, as Lundberg contends, Burke’s theory is a theory of tropes as epistemological tools rather than tropes as a productive principle of discourse. Although, to resist such an understanding of Burke’s theory, we might confine ourselves to Burke’s explicit acknowledgement that he engages in both ontological and epistemological conversations, it would be more convincing to illustrate Burke’s attention to the role of language and metaphor in the process of subjectivity production as it is compared to Lacan’s psychoanalytic account of the subject.

Speaking “Lacanian,” Burke’s rhetorical criticism arguably centers on the Imaginary as a level of appearances (mé/connaissance) while neglecting the Symbolic as a level of substance (savoir). If we were to accept Lundberg’s argument about Burke’s theory as preoccupation

---

10 Cloud, “The Materiality of Discourse” 154; Farrell 149.
11 According to Lundberg, neo-Aristotelianism is an overarching theory of tropes as ornamentary tools.
12 Talking about the relationship between logology and dramatism, Burke emphasizes that he has those “two terms for the one theory. …‘dramatism’ and ‘logology’ are analogous respectively to the traditional distinction …between ontology and epistemology.” Burke, “Dramatism and Logology” 89.
13 Lacan’s Imaginary and the Symbolic are two dimensions of language, or linguistically mediated human reality. Reality as the discursive is set against the Real as the non-discursive. Lacan’s reality and the Real parallel
with the Imaginary, we would have to admit that Burkean rhetorical criticism is superficial and somewhat limited in its political and ethical impulse. For example, to research a national narrative only in its imaginary particularity is to read what a particular national subject says about the national self and the national other without accounting for what makes the national subject speak. From the point of view of Lacan’s theory, an exclusive analysis of the Imaginary is simply a descriptive exercise. To explore a national narrative also by engaging its symbolic logic, however, is to evaluate whether and how the national subject adjusts its specific vision of the national self and the national other to an understanding of the self as eternally lacking or imperfect. The distinction between the Imaginary (mé/connaissance) and the Symbolic (savoir) is not only central to the upcoming discussion of the analytic potential of Burke’s theory, but the terms are also key methodological categories of my ethical critique of psycho-rhetorical national narratives in modern Russia. Before I address this further, however, I must return for a moment to another issue that might arguably diminish the theoretical and analytical rigor of a Lacanian rhetorical criticism.

It is peculiar that while Lundberg disapproves of Burke’s purported captivation with appearances, Peter Dews regrets Lacan’s supposed shortage of interest in exactly the same: the particular, the variable. Lundberg and Dews then conclude that both Burke’s and Lacan’s theories respectively are inapt for social and cultural critique. As Dews believes, the way Lacan conceptualizes the subject leaves the critic with no opportunity to analyze and evaluate social

---

14 The national other refers to all particular national others of the national subject.
15 The lack of the subject’s substance, or the radical inability of the speaking being to be what the subject says or thinks of him/herself, is paradoxically the only stable, substantial feature of the subject, therefore “[t]he tension between the symbolic and the real is…substantial….It’s an upokeimenon.” Upokeimenon (written as ὑποκείμενον in Greek) stands for substance. Lacan, Seminar, Book II 323.
16 Dews 108.
orders that exist and are galvanized by specific material relations. This arguably “returns psychoanalysis to a historical and political vacuum.” In other words, Dews is critical of Lacan’s psychoanalysis for it is supposedly a theory of formal, general subjectivity production (the Symbolic) that is severed from a possibility to account for existence of particular social realities (the Imaginary) because:

[t]here is in Lacan’s work…nothing of [the] conflict between nature and culture – a conflict which frequently takes on a tragic dimension….The unconscious is not understood as the locus of a more primitive or rudimentary type of mental activity, or of a demand for sensuous fulfillment which is incompatible with civilization, and which disrupts the coherence of conscious discourse in order to make its message known…. Dews suggests treating the conscious (the sphere of appearances, or the Imaginary, or mé/connaissance) and the unconscious (the sphere of substance, or the Symbolic, or savoir) as two different languages, with the former being false consciousness and the latter being the locus of true motives. Thus placing the Imaginary in a stark opposition to the Symbolic, Dews re-theorizes the latter as merged with the Real (the realm of true material reasons guiding ideology). As a result the critic, as Dews believes, will be able to observe certain correspondences between specific extra-discursive events and specific statements of the subject. Thus, just as Cloud does, Dews invites back the certitude (in the form of physical, as well as, oddly, economic and political forces) that is supposedly vehemently withheld by

---

17 Dews 108.
18 Dews 107.
19 As it will become clear as this chapter moves along, the Imaginary is the order of the ego, a conscious idea of the self mediated by the signifier; the signifier is in the order of the Symbolic, the unconscious.
poststructuralism. As I argue, the only certitude a Lacanian-Burkean study is based on is the certitude of productive lack.

Against the background of Cloud’s critique of postmodernism, Lundberg’s dismissal of Burke’s theory of human motives and Dews’s disappointment with Lacan’s psychoanalysis, my attempts to combine Lacan’s and Burke’s accounts of subjectivity production consonant with a larger poststructural project to execute an ideological reading of national narratives may seem like a risky enterprise. In this chapter I venture to prove the opposite: to offer a Lacanian-Burkean theory of national identity renegotiation that is politically charged, ethically motivated and propitious for activism.

The question of whether Burke’s and Lacan’s (or any other poststructural theories) can engage in a fruitful conversation with each other is not so much connected with the issue of the compatibility (or incompatibility) of Burke’s work and poststructural ideas, but with the perceived ambiguity of Burke’s philosophy. As William H. Rueckert points out, “[there] are as many Burkes as there are books and essays by him, and probably more Burkes than there are books because there are often many Burkes in one book.”20 The many faces of Burke can be explained by the many roles he performs: the dialectician, the dramatist, the logologist, the tropist, the comedian and others, as well as by various interpretations of Burke’s works.21 Samuel Southwell and David Damrosch, for instance, characterize Burke’s scholarship as hermeneutics; Frank Lentricchia and Giles Gunn see Burke as a critical theorist; Barbara

20 Rueckert, “Some of the Many Kenneth Burkes” 1.
21 Dramatism is Burke’s theory of language as action, while logology (“words-about-words”) is a theory of language as knowledge: “My 1968 ‘Dramatism’ article…features what we humans are (the symbol-using animal). Logology is rooted in the range and quality of knowledge that we acquire.” Burke, Rhetoric of Religion vi; Burke, “Dramatism and Logology” 89.
Biesecker, Timothy Crusius, Cary Nelson, Robert Wess, David Cratis Williams and others link Burke’s philosophy with the postmodern/poststructural project.\footnote{22}{Biesecker, *Addressing Postmodernity*. On certain parallels between Burke and poststructural thought, see Blair; Cheney, Garvin-Doxas, and Torrens; Chesebro, “Kenneth Burke”; Condit 223-237; Henderson, “Dramatism”; Thomas.}

Most often such variations in reading stem from the constant unfolding of Burke’s thought throughout the years. The “indecisiveness” of Burke’s scholarship has prompted critics to consider how to characterize Burke’s philosophy, as ontology or epistemology, which later shifted into a discussion about which study, of being or knowledge, comes first both in a logical and temporal sense.\footnote{23}{Condit 207.} Placing an emphasis on its epistemological contribution, Burke’s account of human motives (just as any traditional rhetorical theory), as I already mentioned, is arguably in stark contrast to Lacan’s psychoanalysis.

The question of a radical shift from ontology to epistemology or vice versa in Burke’s writings at one point became a primary issue among Burkean scholars. While, on the one hand, such detailed consideration of Burke’s theory has certainly been beneficial to Burkean studies, the emphasis on the seemingly unintelligible break in Burke’s career, on the other hand, “harbors the capacity to radically compromise the unity...of the entire Burke corpus.”\footnote{24}{Biesecker astutely contends, all those seemingly irreconcilable differences and irreparable breaks in Burke’s scholarship, so rigorously debated by Burkean scholars, should not preclude critics from viewing Burke’s theory in all its complexity:}

Burke’s thought is constantly on the move, perpetually on the make, chronically undoing itself....Burke’s works resemble more a crypt than a maze; more the working out of a desire than the accomplishment of a project. All of this is not meant to suggest that I do not see Burke affirming, or negating, as the case may

\footnote{22}{Biesecker, *Addressing Postmodernity*. On certain parallels between Burke and poststructural thought, see Blair; Cheney, Garvin-Doxas, and Torrens; Chesebro, “Kenneth Burke”; Condit 223-237; Henderson, “Dramatism”; Thomas.}
\footnote{23}{Condit 207.}
\footnote{24}{Biesecker, *Addressing Postmodernity* 103.}
be, distinct positions. It is meant to suggest, however, that the series of decisive engagements we call Burke’s thought may not be best understood by assuming that a logic of progression obtains between them.  

Burke’s “false starts, delays, fissures, and detours,” as Biesecker stresses, generate opportunities for a more careful and fruitful engagement with Burke.

The passage above presents Biesecker’s “deconstructive...reading” of Burke, which can also be employed with respect to Lacan, especially for the purposes of Burke and Lacan’s combined reading. Just as with Burke, Lacan’s work constantly evolved. This prompted some commentators, according to Dylan Evans, to approach Lacan’s scholarship as a collection of separate theoretical phases or, on the contrary, as a fixed narrative bereft of significant changes in scholarly trajectories. Evans questions both extremes and stresses that Lacan’s “theoretical vocabulary advances by means of accretion rather than mutation.” Similar to “Burke’s playful, often fragmented, nonlinear style,” Lacan’s writings are too (intentionally or not) enigmatic. What is more important, however, is that neither Burke nor Lacan yearn for neatness. Coherence, which is expressed in “harmonious naming” or as “untroubled happiness,” is precisely the opposite of the goals of Lacan’s psychoanalytic practice and antithetical to Burke’s philosophy.

Despite their opaque styles and theoretical fluctuations, neither Burke’s nor Lacan’s writings are disjointed. Both theorists put forward comprehensive theories that encompass the questions of being and knowledge (and also truth). For Burke, the study of being - “what we humans are (the symbol-using animal)” - is necessarily connected with the study of knowledge:

25 Biesecker, Addressing Postmodernity 15-16.
26 Biesecker, Addressing Postmodernity 16.
27 Biesecker, Addressing Postmodernity 16.
28 Evans x.
29 Condit 207.
30 Burke, Terms for Order, 63; Lacan, Seminar, Book VII, 302. See also Burke, Permanence and Change 19, 23, 26, 125.
“the range and quality of knowledge that we acquire when our bodies...come to profit by their peculiar aptitude for...’natural’ languages.” Such reciprocity of Burke’s ontology and epistemology, when a consideration of the former necessarily leads to a discussion of the latter and vice versa, is akin to the treatment of being and knowledge in Lacan’s theory, which “radically imbricates epistemology and ontology.” Burke and Lacan are certainly far from advocating for universal essence and certain truth, and yet their theories contain moral judgments, and thus are thoroughly ethical.

Both in Burke’s and Lacan’s views, human animals or moving bodies become truly human or desiring and thus capable of action only through language (or rather in fantasy/attitude oscillating between two aspects of language: the unconscious and the conscious) and only under the condition that language fails to grasp the whole complexity of the non-discursive (that is, under the condition that the split, as I discuss below, is an effect of the subject’s lacking nature). This point serves as an ontological foundation of Burke’s and Lacan’s theories. The accent on the incomparability of the non-discursive (Burke’s “sheer motion” and Lacan’s Real) and the discursive (Burke’s action and Lacan’s reality) as productive of human subjectivity places both theories between the extremes of idealism and materialism (thus shielding them from an unjustified accusation of idealism). In addition, it also brings attention to Burke’s preoccupation with the question of subjectivity production, which allows countering Lundberg’s dismissal of Burke’s theory as merely descriptive of particular instances of subjectivity.

---

31 Burke, “Dramatism and Logology” 89-90.
32 Campbell 31.
33 Epistemology as the study of knowledge and ethics as the study of moral values are two distinct but related branches of philosophy. As Noah Lemos points out, “moral philosophy, construed broadly, is concerned with what actions are morally right and wrong, what kinds of things are intrinsically good or bad, and what traits of character are moral virtues or vices. Whether and how we can have knowledge or justified belief about these matters is a main concern of moral epistemology.” Thus moral epistemology exists at the intersection of ethics and epistemology. Lemos 479.
34 Burke, On Symbols and Society 53.
Taking the tension thesis further, one may see that in language the subject, in attempts to match the discursive with the non-discursive, in other words, to follow desire for unity, makes this process intelligible in a particular cultural and sociopolitical context. Such a view on the subject who is ridden by the asymmetry between what he/she aspires to be and what he/she is, and who therefore maneuvers in language to secure a relatively stable, albeit equivocal, idea or knowledge of the self, stresses an epistemological element in Burke’s and Lacan’s scholarship. This epistemological emphasis in Lacan’s and Burke’s theories helps to cast off Dews’ doubt about “the incompatibility between desire and speech [that] cannot be given any social content.” Equally important, it also aids in highlighting the discursive nature of power relations which shape specific narratives of the subject.

As Burke points out, since language keeps people at a distance from the non-symbolic realm, or, in Lacanian terms, bars them from the Real, it endows them with an ability to act, or to choose among possible ways in attempts to mitigate the said incomparability of the discursive and the non-discursive. While each and every attempt to achieve seamless representation of the non-verbal by the verbal fails, how exactly various subjects try to bridge the unbridgeable, or try to enjoy their aspired unity, is of ethical significance. Both Lacan’s and Burke’s theories do not commit either to an epistemic realist claim that there is one transcendental truth as a guide for action, or an epistemic materialist assumption that true motives of human action are not universal, but relative to specific contexts. The incompatibility of the non-discursive and the discursive results in a multitude of human choices qua truths; and this proliferation of choices is at the same time the only transcendental truth against which those choices can be judged. Such peculiar juxtaposition of uncertainty and certitude allows characterizing Lacan’s and Burke’s

---

35 See Burke, Language as Symbolic Action 9,11; Lacan, Écrits 634.
36 Dews 108.
accounts of subjectivity negotiation as mitigated relativism. To sum up, both Burke’s and Lacan’s theories can be characterized as ontologically grounded and ethically driven epistemologies or epistemological ontologies with a strong ethical emphasis.

While the foregoing survey of Lacan’s and Burke’s ontologies, epistemologies and ethics might be (if only barely) enough to respond to Cloud’s, Dews’ and Lundberg’s reluctance to grant Lacan’s and Burke’s theories their political and analytical vigor, a more thorough review and comparison of Lacan’s and Burke’s accounts of subjectivity is required to offer an adequate (both theoretically and methodologically) foundation for a psycho-rhetorical study of national identity renegotiation. What I present as a Lacanian-Burkean theory of national identity negotiation is not a collection of various analytic tools lifted from Lacan’s psychoanalysis and Burke’s theory of human motives, but a juxtaposition of Lacan’s and Burke’s accounts of subjectivity as they complement and counterbalance each other. I point out that together Lacan’s and Burke’s ontologies, epistemologies and ethics shape an understanding of how the national subject is produced (savoir), what the national subject knows (and says) about the national self and national other (mé/connaissance), and finally, how what the national subject knows/says can be evaluated against the way subjectivity is produced (i.e., the dialectic of savoir and mé/connaissance).

More specifically, I begin by accentuating an effect of the process of individuation at birth, or what Lacan calls the real lack, followed by an explication of the second lack, or an effect of the tension between the Real as the non-discursive and the discursive, or the human world of linguistically mediated reality. Both lacks are constitutive of the subject, yet in a slightly different sense. The earlier lack is a condition of possibility for the second lack, or, in
other words, attention to the real lack explains how the subject becomes possessed by the
unquenchable desire for completeness, desire to become someone that the subject is really not.\textsuperscript{37}

National identity construction is then set in motion and sustained by precisely this
impulse to cover lack or attend to desire by discursive means, that is, in fantasy/attitude. An
image that the national subject holds of the self has to be constantly renegotiated since this
covering-up is unsuccessful every time. This failure translates into a permanent split within the
subject, between the Imaginary, \textit{mê/connaissance} as what the subject consciously knows of
himself, and the Symbolic, \textit{savoir} as an unconscious movement of signifiers productive of that
the subject knows of him/herself. Submerged into the unconscious, desire periodically resurfaces
in the Imaginary (or on the level of consciousness) in the form of symptom – a constitutive
relationship between the national other and the national self. The national subject never equals
the self; it exists only in relation to his/her lack and therefore only in relation to the national
other. Considering the notion of the split, it is possible to reformulate the above definition of
national identity construction as negotiation of an attitude toward or fantasy of what the national
subject wants to be into a more specific idea of national identity negotiation as the dialectic of
\textit{savoir} and \textit{mê/connaissance}. National identity negotiation then can be designed as a process that
discursively masks the constitutive dependence of the national self on nobody (no national other)
but his/her lack.\textsuperscript{38}

By emphasizing Lacan’s concept of lack (a related notion of the \textit{objet a} explicates how
lack is incessantly posed as a missing object or the suffering self and then “recovered” in a
symptom) and Burke’s notions of imperfection (and the subsequent purification that results in
redemption required to restore a state of perfection), I draw attention to a Lacanian-Burkean

\textsuperscript{37} As lacking, the speaking subject never equals what he or she imagines and aspires to be.
\textsuperscript{38} Similarly M. Lane Bruner in \textit{Strategies of Remembrance} discusses national identity as incessantly
negotiated around the repressed.
ethical system. It is organized between the opposite poles of fantasy/attitudes: categorical rejection of human incompleteness and full acceptance of constitutive lack. In addition to evaluating national narratives between the ethical coordinates of tragic mourning and comic melancholy, I further offer a more nuanced method to evaluate specific instances of fantasy/attitude, or modes of masking the split within the national subject. For this reason I propose to complement national fantasies/attitudes of comic melancholy and tragic mourning with Burke’s frames and Lacan’s four discourses. Tragic, comic, epic, elegiac, satiric, burlesque and grotesque frames are content-specific variations of national fantasy/attitude, while the Master’s, the University’s, the Hysteric’s and the Analyst’s Discourses are structural permutations of national fantasy/attitude.

A reading of national fantasy/attitude through the prism of the concepts of lack (or imperfection), the objet a (or purification as the compensatory mechanism), symptom (redemption as the end result of purification), does not only permit us to gauge an ethical position of each of the four analyzed national subjects on a scale from comic melancholy (which is characteristic of civic nationalist discourse as the most progressive mode) to tragic mourning (which corresponds with extreme ethnic/cultural nationalist rhetoric as the most hazardous mode), but also to discuss national narratives with regard to tactical opportunities that specific frames present the subject within a larger context of liberal democracy and neo-liberal rationality and against the background of Russia’s anti-fascist history.

As I explain more thoroughly further in this chapter, Lacan’s theory of the four Discourses accounts for variations in the unconscious structure that underpins the process of national identity negotiation. As Lacan stresses, a psychoanalytic inquiry into desire necessarily
“requires the assistance of structural elements.” Burke’s frames in turn emphasize, crudely speaking, conscious knowledge that the national subject possesses of itself and its national other. To explore a psycho-rhetorical national narrative exclusively in its Imaginary dimension, on the one hand, is to confine an analysis to its “rhetorical” part, to read what the particular national subject knows and says about itself and its particular national others without making allowance for “the psychical” – the deep structural logic responsible for this conscious knowledge. To pay attention solely to the Symbolic, on the other hand, is to consider the structure that guides the national subject’s conscious knowledge, while offsetting the value of rhetorical analysis. However, to analyze a national narrative through the prism of both the Symbolic and the Imaginary, that is, psycho-rhetorically, is to judge if and how a specific vision of the national self squares with the truth of the national self as an imagined community without a corresponding necessary essence, or the real national upokeimenon.

As noted, the concepts of the Imaginary and the Symbolic are decisive in my theoretical and methodological considerations. They are multidimensional concepts. Viewed synchronically, the Symbolic and the Imaginary are two linguistically mediated orders of psychic experience. The Symbolic is the unconscious formation of the psyche, which is structured like language, and the Imaginary is conscious speech of the human subject as it is guided by the unconscious. From the diachronic angle, the Imaginary and the Symbolic are often discussed as phases of the child’s psychical development. Strictly speaking, however, the mirror stage is a primitive model of subjectivity construction that is already enmeshed in the social, “already bounded by the register

---

40 While distinguishing between the rhetorical and the psychical from a terminological point of view, I must emphasize that the two are intertwined, since, as Lacan says, “the unconscious is structured like a language.” Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 203.
of the symbolic.” Lacan emphasizes that “[the] domain of the symbolic does not have a simple relation of succession to the imaginary domain….We do not pass from one to the other in one jump from the anterior to the posterior, once the pact and the symbol are established.” As I turn to the theoretical foundation and methodology of the upcoming psycho-rhetorical analysis of nationalisms in modern Russia, I discuss the ontological, epistemological and ethical underpinnings of Lacan’s and Burke’s theories diachronically - from the angle of psychic development, followed by a consideration of the Imaginary and the Symbolic at a synchronic level.

2.2 The Two Lacks as the Birthplace of Subjectivity

Although siding with the thesis of the constitutive capability of language, Lacan and Burke do not grant it full inaugurating power. As I have mentioned above, neither the discursive, ideal, nor the non-discursive, material, alone is the only sufficient generative force: “It is precisely this relation between action and motion, itself structured in and by an irreducible distance, that constitutes the economy of the subject.” The unsurpassable asymmetry of the non-discursive and the discursive, or in other words, the inability of the subject as a symbol-using animal to apprehend the Real directly, without failure, is what Lacan calls lack. Lacan’s
lack, or Burke’s imperfection, is the “lack of being whereby the [speaking] being exists.” Since the notion of lack/imperfection is the foundation of both Lacan’s and Burke’s theories, including their ethical considerations, as well as an integral element of national identity construction, I must stay on the topic slightly longer.

Lacan tirelessly reminds us that lack begets the subject. Strictly speaking, the subject is the seat of two lacks:

The first emerges from the central defect around which the dialectic of the advent of the subject to his own being in the relation to the Other turns—by the fact that the subject depends on the signifier and that the signifier is first of all in the field of the Other. This lack takes up the other lack, which is the real, earlier lack, to be situated at the advent of the living being, that is to say, at sexed reproduction. The real lack is what the living being loses, that part of himself qua living being, in reproducing himself through the way of sex. This lack is real because it relates to ultimate jouissance, before or beyond their meditation by imaginary and symbolic means. A distant echo of the Real as it reaches the human being, is the pure sensations of pleasure (the most of it can be said to coincide with the experience of fetal metabolic homeostasis) and pain. The Real that I refer to as non-discursive is the real Real. The idea of the symbolic Real, or the Real as the impossible, brings attention to the gap between the Real and the Symbolic, that is, the second lack, from where desire springs towards jouissance. The imaginary Real, or the Real as the sensible, is the space between the Real and the Imaginary, the space of the real lack and libido, which is engendered in/by the former. The real Imaginary is a dimension of Gestalt, or a united body image that the subject sees in his/her own reflection in the mirror or in other people. The image of the completed and coherent human form becomes foundational for the production of the ego, which occupies the space of the imaginary Imaginary, while the symbolic Imaginary is the locus of meaning qua product of signification. Meaning, according to Lacan, “is not the things in their raw state.” The symbolic Imaginary then can be said to be an image without a corresponding material form. Such (symbolic) image radically differs from Gestalt, in the sense that the former portrays what cannot be portrayed insofar as it is hidden, insofar that it always eludes us. From this angle the symbolic Imaginary can be explained in relation to the issue of representation of God in various religions. As unknown and immaterial, God is considered to be the one who has no image and appears only in an “epiphanic form” – as a catachresis. The latter, in the words of Paul de Man, “gives face to the faceless.” The remaining categories of the Symbolic highlight distinct properties of the signifier. The symbolic Symbolic emphasizes the concept of the negative and the differential logic of language, while the real Symbolic is the dimension of the materiality, or singularity and indivisibility, of the signifier, since “it can…be said that something is not in its place only…[when it] can change places – that is, of the symbolic. [But] the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always and in every case in its place….” Finally, the imaginary Symbolic is the plane of the gaze, or the ego-ideal, which can be said to function as the privileged signifier. The latter anchors not just a singular meaning, but meanings within a particular sociopolitical system. Lacan, Seminar, Book III, 119. See Žižek, “Schlagend, aber nicht Treffend!”; Paul de Man, The Resistance to Theory 44; Lacan, Écrits 719.

something real, namely, that the living being, by being subject to sex, has fallen under the blow of individual death.\textsuperscript{46}

The real lack, or what Burke’s describes as the “‘fall’ from a prior state of [Edenic or divine] unity” and what can be interpreted in a Lacanian manner as “the fall of non-being into being,” is immediate at birth.\textsuperscript{47} Upon his/her birth, as Lacan puts it, “[the subject] is no longer immortal.”\textsuperscript{48} Such immortality defines only the mythical “‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ person,” or the divine, “Absolute Being,” which is the same as non-being, since no human being has ever lived to experience it, or rather lived and thus never experienced it.\textsuperscript{49}

To explicate how the human being comes to “lose” immortality and how this primordial, radical “loss” shapes the human psyche, Lacan draws attention to a biological fact that organisms that reproduce asexually by, for example, fragmentation, can essentially live forever by passing virtually invariable genetic material to their offspring. Meanwhile human beings are born with the genetic material of both their parents, reproduce by passing only half of their genetic material to their offspring (thus losing the other half of their chromosomes) and then die. Lacan emphasizes that meiosis, or the biological mechanism of creating a new life by joining two organisms that lose a part of themselves in the process, is very much like the combinatory logic of signification that always results into a certain loss or surplus (which are the same in Lacanian psychoanalysis): “what emerges from this genetics if not the dominant function, in the determination of certain elements of the living organism, of a combinatory that operates at certain of its stages by the expulsion of remainders?”\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{46} Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XI} 204-205.
\textsuperscript{47} Burke, \textit{Rhetoric of Religion} 175; Dolar 69.
\textsuperscript{48} Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 205.
\textsuperscript{49} Burke, Grammar of Motives 35; Burke, On Symbols and Society 270.
\textsuperscript{50} Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 151.
While it is not immediately transparent how for Lacan subjectivity gets constructed as an answer to the primordial “loss,” as a response invited by “a desperate affirmation of life…[in its] purest form,” it is important to point out that Lacan does not claim a direct, causal relationship between the failed immortality of the human organism as a matter of biology and a relentless attempt to overcome this failure to live eternally as a psychic experience. On the contrary, as Stella Sandford insists, by “pointing out an affinity between the enigmas of sexuality and the play of the signifier,” Lacan draws attention to the fact that biological aspects of human life can function only in the sphere of the human psyche indirectly, or as a myth.\textsuperscript{51} That is why Lacan tells a story of the lamella - a mythical shapeless and sexless creature that can “[survive] any division, and scissiparous intervention,” “[the] organ, whose characteristic is not to exist, but which is nevertheless an organ.”\textsuperscript{52} Unlike the human organism, which cannot escape the destiny of birth and death, the lamella, or “the libido, qua pure life instinct,” lives an “immortal life, [an] irrepresible life,…[an] indestructible life.”\textsuperscript{53} What follows from the story of the odd organ that “vanishes” at birth is that “human life is never ‘just life’: humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things.”\textsuperscript{54} This extraordinary life force is what Lacan ironically dubs the death drive.

Since Lacan often does not make it easy on his readers by indulging in tortuous prose, a reading of Freud, whose work the former puts at the foundation of his psychoanalytic theory, clarifies how exactly the human being comes to be radically lacking. Here I refer to the emphasis

\textsuperscript{53} Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XI} 197-198. Lacan succinctly adds that “[t]he libido is to be conceived as an organ, in both senses of the term, as organ-part of the organism and as organ-instrument,” meaning that libido emerges and exists in relation to the human organism, however circuitous this connection is, and carries out a certain function in the construction of human subjectivity. Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XI} 187.
\textsuperscript{54}Žižek, The Parallax View 62.
that Freud places on oceanic sensibility at the very beginning of *Civilization and its Discontents*, by the way of commenting on the notion of oceanic feeling originally introduced by Romain Rolland. According to Freud, at birth the infant cannot differentiate between him/herself and the external world, experiencing a feeling of limitlessness. But as the child matures psychically and learns to view him/herself as an autonomous human being, he/she is longer “eternal, [no longer]…without perceptible limits, and in that way oceanic.” Stated otherwise, Lacan speaks of the “lost” immortality in not only temporal but also spatial terms – as a pre-linguistic, mythical experience of bodily limitlessness.

Before I move into a discussion of the real lack in relation to the mirror stage as a transition from an oceanic state of unity with the external world to a more exclusive idea of the self, and explain why the attention to the development of subjectivity through the mirror stage and the subsequent Oedipal phase is important in the context of the study of national identity construction, I want to briefly spell out the relationship of the real, or radical, lack and the second, or symbolic, lack. The real lack as a perceived loss of a mythical, or pre-linguistic, sensation of limitlessness is the tension created in the space between the Real and the Imaginary. This traumatic experience stems from the human being’s dependence on the other, or another human being, the image of which plays a critical part at the very early stage of the subject’s psychical development. The second lack as the impossibility of the Symbolic to reflect the Real in its fullness occupies the space between the Real and the Symbolic and can be

---

55 Rolland, qtd. in Fisher 9.
56 Since the human being does not have an access to the Real beyond language, any pre-linguistic phenomenon is thus necessarily mythical: “The libido…is unreal. Unreal is not imaginary. The unreal is defined by articulating itself on the real in a way that eludes us, and it is precisely this that requires that its representation should be mythical….“ Lacan, *Seminar, Book XI* 205.
57 Burke describes this mythical state of the pleasurable, the pursuit for which starts from the real lack, as “a relation that our body probably comes nearest to enjoying when rested, sufficiently fed, sexually appeased, free of danger, without ailments, and near water, on a balmy day.” Coincidently, Lacan states that “dozing off is the most natural of all vital states.” Burke, *Attitudes toward History* 371; Lacan, *Seminar, Book II* 233.
attributed to the subject’s dependence on the Other qua language. As it transpires from Lacan’s discussion of the two lacks, the real lack eventually gives way to the second lack. Said otherwise, as the subject matures psychically, he/she attempts to deal with the real lack, or the impossibility for the subject to revert to the pre-linguistic infinitude, that is, the gratifying sense of oneness with the mother as the first, privileged other in the subject’s life and, by extension, the external world, by attempting to recover the second lack, that is, by pursuing the fantasmatic certainty of the subject’s autonomy. In his/her newly found aspirations for psychical finitude, the subject (or, rather, the speaking subject, since one has to speak to obtain subjectivity) relies on the signifier and therefore he/she is destined for defeat: “our finitude is always already a failed finitude—one could say a finitude with a leak in it.”  

Although Lacan poses the real lack to be chronologically prior to the second lack, Žižek warns against reducing the role of the Symbolic. The death drive as the movement toward the ultimate enjoyment of identity fullness, he emphasizes, does not stem from the sole incompatibility of the Real and the Imaginary. Žižek fairly notes that what makes the human being the subject he/she is cannot be viewed as something pre-linguistic: “it is the very mediation of the symbolic order that transforms the organic ‘instinct’ into an unquenchable longing which can find solace only in death.”  

Attention to the fact that the Imaginary is always intertwined with the Symbolic, as explained below, allows us to see that the death drive springs from the space between the Real of human organism and the (Imaginary and Symbolic) reality of human life.

As the infant’s basic needs are attended by the other, whose image the infant relies on to construct a relatively stable image of the self (for the self can only be constructed as an

---

58 Zupančič, The Odd One 52.
59 Žižek, Tarrying with the Negative 175.
opposition to the other), this process does not occur in isolation from language. It is in a demand, which emerges in a form of a cry, or a vocalized, quasi-linguistic articulation of need, that the infant comes to manifest his/her longing for a pleasurable, libidinized sense of wholeness, which is at first perceived as supposedly original oceanic limitlessness and later as a well-delineated and certain being.\(^{60}\) Put differently, the Real of the human organism is apprehended through the Other, more precisely, by the mediation of language, which is always an appeal to somebody other than oneself – the spectral other or the desired object, both of which exercises the function of otherness:

An infant at the breast…must be very strongly impressed by the fact that some sources of excitation, which he will later recognize as his own bodily organs, can provide him with sensations at any moment, whereas other sources evade him from time to time—among them what he desires most of all, his mother’s breast—and only reappear as a result of his screaming for help. In this way there is for the first time set over against the ego an “object,” in the form of something which exists “outside” and which is only forced to appear by a special action.\(^{61}\)

Thus, as soon as the child is born, and due to the human physical immaturity at birth, the newborn starts to express his/her need in a cry, or, in Lacan’s terms, demand, but there appears to be always something left that no one will ever be able to gratify. This unsatisfied leftover of a demand is desire. Therefore, from the very start the subject is guided by, speaking in Burke’s

\(^{60}\) Lacan borrows Freud’s term of libido and conceptualizes it as an aspect of the death drive in his approach to psychoanalysis: “the object [the subject] naturally loses, excrement, and the props he finds in the Other’s desire…come to this place. The activity in the subject I call ‘drive’ (Trip) consists in dealing with these objects in such a way as to recover from them to restore to himself, his earliest loss.” Both the death drive and the primitive libidinal force can be said to belong to the three orders at once: the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The death drive and libido (in his earlier seminars Lacan sees libido as it “is inscribed in the imaginary,” while in Écrits the libido is “in direct contact with the real,” “sometimes almost palpable [comme sensible],” and has a “deadly meaning.” Lacan, *Écrits* 720, 719, 718; Lacan, *Seminar, Book II* 326.

\(^{61}\) Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents 15-16.
terms, the “principle of perfection,” the “entelechial principle, which is the same as Lacan’s desire, or the “will to jouissance.”

2.3 The Mirror Stage and the Study of National Identity Construction

The longing for completeness, as I already noted, partially owes to the fact that “the human being is born with foetalised traits, that is to say deriving from premature birth.”

Lacan builds on Louis Bolk’s fetalization theory, according to which the infant is essentially a fetus for the first nine to seventeenth months of his/her life. Prematurity expresses itself in the initial inadequacy of the infant’s sensorimotor (as well as psychic) development. The infant at first perceives his/her body not as coordinated and delineated, but as a “fragmented body, or “infantile formlessness (where all things are patchy combinations wholly alien to the realm of Order as we know it).” As the infant enters the mirror stage, the he/she rises above the primal sensation of physiological insufficiency, or the traumatic experience of the Real, of his/her (disjointed, or fragmented) body, by wrestling “an original noetic positivity” for him/herself.

---

64 See Burns.
65 Lacan, Seminar, Book III 39; Burke, Rhetoric of Religion 214. The newborn experiences him/herself as a tumultuous reservoir of unstructured primitive motives, “stitched into the maternal companionship which saturates a certain primitive need he has, while he takes his very first steps in life.” Lacan, Seminar, Book I 210.
66 Lacan, Seminar, Book I 125. In addition to the world of nature and animal society, the human body as a biological apparatus and a source of primary sensations - pleasure and pain - is located in the sphere of the Real: “the only signs of which the subject is consciously aware are signs of pleasure and pain. As with all the other unconscious processes, nothing else reaches the level of consciousness but those signs there.” Burke, too, grounds experience of the body and pure sensation in the sphere of motion: “the offices of the human community [are] erected atop the purely ‘natural’ community of the human organism, considered as an animal that somehow retains within itself the motivational traces of its development from ‘simpler’ and ‘lower’ biologic forms[,] First, we might imagine an original faint distinction between pleasurable and painful impressions, beginning perhaps in the distinction between a metabolic process that proceeded without interference and one that was in some way impeded or disturbed.” As Renata Salecl and Elaine Scarry also suggest, the pure or primary sensations of pain are located at a point where words needed to describe those sensations fail miserably, and this point where “all words cease and all categories fail” is in the space of the Real. It is peculiar that this sensation, however, must be differentiated from
Said otherwise, prior to the moment when the infant fully masters his/her own body and thus his/her needs, he/she manages to compensate for his/her corporeal fragmentation in an imaginary manner.\textsuperscript{67}

The fact that the primary caregiver attends to the infant’s needs is a condition of possibility for an idea of the self. The infant, as Lacan argues, longingly catches his/her own reflection in the mirror and identifies with it. This mirror image, however, is not only a reflection of the infant’s form in the mirror, but rather the infant’s affectively caught visual perception of the mother as a coordinated and autonomous body. The infant then imagines that he/she sees his/her own fragmented body as an organized whole. The imaginary role of the mother therefore exceeds its biological significance and provides the subject with mental support in his/her attempts to revert to a state of impossible oceanic limitlessness. What is described above is the “mirror stage,” or “mirror phase” as both an initial phase of human psyche maturation and a primitive model of subjectivation. And this is precisely when and how the ego, or a conscious idea of selfhood, begins to emerge.\textsuperscript{68}

---

\textsuperscript{67} According to Lacan, the subject can be referred to as the subject only when he passes through the mirror stage and assumes language, in other words, when his ego found its support in the Symbolic (which can occur successfully as in neurosis or otherwise as in psychosis and perversion). Before the subject becomes “the true subject,” he exists, properly speaking, “in the form of the dummy [mort].” In my work I use the term subject in general: it applies both to the dummy and the true subject, depending on the context. In certain cases when I need to underscore the developing character of the subject, I may use qualifiers such as nascent. Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 461.

\textsuperscript{68} The ego is not formed fully before the subject takes on a symbolic kind of unity. While the mirror stage is explicated as prior to the subject’s assumption of language, the ego formation is completed (yet provisionally) only upon submission to language. “[I]t is in the Other that the subject is constituted as ideal, that he has to regulate the completion of what comes as ego, or ideal ego—which is not the ego ideal—that is to say, to constitute himself in his imaginary reality. Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XII} 144.
Consideration of the mirror stage is rather relevant for a study of national identity construction. While, in isolation from the symbolic dynamics of the Oedipal phase, the mirror stage does not suffice to explain the phenomenon of national identity, it nevertheless builds the very foundation of the national subject. First, the narcissistic character of the mirror stage elucidates how the “primitive paranoid dialectic of identification with the counterpart” gives an impetus to a tragic relationship between the national self and the national other.69

Lacan theorizes the subject’s primary relation to the other; that is, the relationship between the developing ego and its specular image as narcissistic: “[i]t’s one’s own ego that one loves in love, one’s own ego made real on the imaginary level of the self.”70 Since the mirror image, by means of which the ego is formed, is ultimately an external image, the ego is both an anticipation of an ideal unity and “frustration in its very essence.”71 Following the subject’s failed narcissistic attempts to coincide with the reflected other, the imaginary relationship is staged as inescapably aggressive and paranoid. The reflected other, which is in fact the ego’s virtual ideal image, is therefore apprehended as a rival who supposedly threatens the unity of the subject:

In every relationship with the other…there is some echo of this relation of exclusion, it’s either him or me, because, on the imaginary plane, the human subject is so constituted that the other is always on the point of re-adopting the place of mastery in relation to him, because there is an ego in [the subject] that is

70 Lacan, Seminar, Book I 142. Similarly Burke states that “love involves the element of desire, a sense of union with something with which one is identified but from which one is divided.” Burke, Attitudes toward History 372.
71 Lacan, Écrits 208. This frustration, as Lacan emphasizes, is not failure to satisfy one of the ego’s “passions,” but frustration of an object (or the mirror image) that is supposed to satisfy those passions. Lacan, Écrits 92. See also Lacan, Écrits 208.
always in part foreign to him, a master implanted in him over and above his set of
tendencies, conduct, instincts, and drives.\textsuperscript{72}

Overwhelmed by the primitive (or imaginary) alienating impulses, the subject, as he/she passes
into the Oedipal phase, learns how to mitigate the ambiguously aggressive relationship with the
specular other.

Although Lacan refers to the “‘pacifying’ function” of the Symbolic that permits the
subject to overcome the disturbing ambivalence of the Imaginary, he does not argue that in the
Symbolic the subject escapes the inherently paranoid and aggressive relation to the other. On the
contrary, the Symbolic only further masks the subject’s constitutive lack. Emerging from the
imaginary oscillation between narcissism and aggression into the Symbolic, the national other is
often raised to a definitive status of enemy, or criminal, who supposedly harbors or attempts to
rob the subject of his/her happiness: “Aggressive tension thus becomes part of the drive,
whenever the drive is frustrated because the ‘other’s’ noncorrespondence [to one’s wishes]
aborts the resolving identification, and this produces a type of object that becomes criminogenic
by interrupting the dialectical formation of one’s ego.”\textsuperscript{73}

The subject that is fully realized in the Symbolic thus is susceptible to an imaginary
tendency to grow paranoid about the other. Although in the Symbolic, which functions in a way
other than the dialectic of (dis)similarity with the specular other, the subject can mitigate his/her
desire for unity with more confidence than in the Imaginary, the outcome is often quite the same.
Similar to the psychotic, the national subject fights to death for its death, most clearly observable
in instances of war or violent conflicts. The national subject often resorts to violent exclusion of

\textsuperscript{72} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 93.
\textsuperscript{73} Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 116. Similar to Lacan’s Imaginary, the Burkean “imagery” is a relationship that is alienated
(love is “a need for some element now experienced as more or less external to it”), anticipated (“promissory,”
“future pleasure”), fundamentally aggressive and competitive (“love leads via fight to anger or hate”). Burke,
\textit{Attitudes toward History} 372, 274.
its national other for the sake of its own certainty (and thus can be qualified as tragic). The
difference between the psychotic and the neurotic (exemplified by the national subject),
however, is that the death drive does not leave the ego shattered; the ego, on the contrary,
emerges as ever more solidified by an operation of exclusion of the other. While both psychosis
and the Imaginary are characterized by aggressive and paranoid tendencies, in psychosis
paranoia and aggression are structural consequences of the repudiation of the Symbolic; in
neurosis though paranoiac and aggressive phenomena are inherited from the primitive narcissism
as an inalienable feature of the subject.

Since “the dialectic of jealousy…is [a] primordial manifestation of communication,” it
makes it that much harder to expropriate the national other of its “criminogenic” status for the
sake of a more ethically responsible, comic way of being the national self. In addition, political
agents often purposefully tap into the constitutively “conflictual” relationship between the
national subject and the national other to shape an appealing image of the national self. Besides,
since “[d]efense…[is] at the origin of paranoia,” the lure of the tragic economy of the national
subject intensifies at traumatic moments in history which threaten to disintegrate the supposed
unity of the national self. To resist such primitive tension, the national subject must find a way
to identify with the fictitious enemy, since this rival is not the national other; the competitor is
lodged within the national self. By identifying with its supposed enemy, the national other
assumes an attitude of “humane enlightenment,” comedy as the most progressive mode of
national identity construction. In order to structure oneself comically, or to maintain an attitude
of lack, a far greater restraint is required to resist both the Imaginary and the Symbolic - the

---

75 Lacan, Seminar, Book III 144.
76 Burke, Attitudes toward History 41.
egocentric, narcissistic lure of imaginary unity supported by the effacing effect of the symbolic structure of metonymy and metaphor.

Before I turn to the Oedipal phase, which will clarify the statements already made with regard to the Symbolic, I must consider another point of relevance of the mirror stage to a study of national identity construction. The tortuous relationship between images of the self and the reflected other reveals the social nature of the subject. As I already showed, in the mirror stage the nascent subject as “the set of imaginary elements of the so-called fragmented body” attempts to coincide with an image of the other qua the ideal self.\(^\text{77}\) Although unable to succeed, “it is by means of [this] gap... opened up by his prematurity…that the human animal is capable of imagining himself mortal [which implies self-consciousness],” that is, becoming the truly intersubjective subject.\(^\text{78}\)

In addition to forming a precondition for the development of subjectivity qua intersubjectivity, the sociality of the mirror stage also allows grounding the concept of the national subject in the Real. If Lacan’s theory relied solely on the differential mechanism of subjectivity production, the national subject would be no more than a history of always shifting constellations of master signifiers without any, however ambiguous, connection to real events (commonly understood as historical events).\(^\text{79}\) To emphasize that psychoanalysis does not disregard the Real(ity) of facts (as, for example, the Real(ity) of a violent riot), I must refer first to the non-mathematical (as opposed to differential), relational logic of the Imaginary.\(^\text{80}\)

\(^{77}\) Lacan, Écrits 461. As Lacan has it, it is only in presence of the other that the subject “establish[es] a relationship between an organism and its reality – or...between the Innenwelt and the Umwelt and consequently shapes an ideal of the self.” Lacan, Écrits 78.

\(^{78}\) Lacan, Écrits 461.

\(^{79}\) Instead, the subject’s history is a history of where the subject’s desire has been. See Lacan, Écrits 413.

\(^{80}\) In my work, the social of the Imaginary has two meanings: the social of the Imaginary as a precondition of intersubjectivity is not the same as a social or relational aspect of the Imaginary.
The mechanism of the mirror stage calls attention to the fact that what engenders the subject is his very first traumatic encounter with the external world experienced as “a painful organic sensation” of “a primordial Discord.” Said otherwise, the human subject is sensitive towards an object – “some element…[that is] experienced as more or less external to [the subject]” and thought to be capable of fulfilling the subject’s desire. Similarly Burke sees a primal, or biological, impulse in sensory images, or what he calls “the imagery” (an equivalent of Lacan’s Imaginary). Lacan and Burke, however, are far from endorsing a “naïve” empiricist position that what we know about the world (and ourselves) comes directly from our senses (after all, “[a]s guides to the real, feelings are deceptive”). Burke’s and Lacan’s concept of the Imaginary make us draw attention to “the register of sensory reactions,” but neither in terms of the instinctual response to a Gestalt, nor in a purely biological mimetic value of those images. Burke’s and Lacan’s concepts of the Imaginary stress the relational, or “the social animus contained in sensations.”

An idea of the national self is produced in response to a perceived image of a specific group of real people endowed with symbolic value (as I explain below, in Lacan’s modified formula of the subject $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ the sign $-$ $S$ stands for the subject’s substantial void; the place of $-$ $S$ is the location of a sensory image of a specific group of real people that takes on a symbolic role of the national other). From this point of view, the national subject is a history of

---

82 Burke, *Attitudes toward History* 372.
83 Burke, *Attitudes toward History* 374.
84 Lacan, *Seminar, Book VII* 30. The concept of a sensory image is not truly biological due to the irreducible discord between the human organism as such (the Real) and an ability of the human speaking being to perceive itself in relation to everything that goes on with and influences the body. Pleasure and pain, as noted before, are the only sensations that are the least mediated by language and thought. A sensory image can be said to belong to the realm of the Real Imaginary.
86 Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* 429.
defensive reactions to the certitude of the national other perceived as a community of “real others” - real people who live in a real geographical location and engage in real acts.\(^{87}\) The fact that the process of subjectivity production stems from the traumatic relationship between the subject and the world external to him emphasizes the role of the Real of sensations. The Real as the *sensible* is that which vicariously creates a condition of possibility for the subject.\(^{88}\)

In the mirror stage the social resides in the mechanism of similarity with somebody. Such similarity is not real, but rather perceived likeness of the subject with its ideal image. The care the mother directs at the infant is accepted as a proof of the mother’s love or pre-symbolic recognition of the infant as “structured by a certain conception of…autonomy” (as Lacan points out, this conception of autonomy is “fundamentally biased and incomplete [partiel et partial], inexpressible, fragmentary,…and profoundly delusional”).\(^{89}\) In pursuit of his/her identity wholeness, the child attempts to be one with the mother by imitating her (hence the mother functions as the mirror image) and simultaneously becoming what she presumably wants him to be (hence having the mother to recognize him as worthy of her approval).\(^{90}\) The notion of imaginary recognition then explains the imaginary literality as an attempt at love.

---

\(^{87}\) Lacan, *Écrits*, 461. As I explain further, the fully formed and functioning (neurotic) subject is drawn to another human being not by the virtue that the other knows who he/she is, but precisely because the other does not, or put it otherwise, because the other is lacking. The certainty of the other is then something that the subject attributes to the desiring other by answering the question of the other’s desire qua being.

\(^{88}\) It is not coincidental that the space between the Imaginary and the Real, or the real lack, the Real as the sensible, is the locus of libido, which Lacan defines as “something [that is] almost palpable [comme sensible].” By placing the libido in the sphere of the Imaginary Real, it is possible to solve the purported inconsistency of Lacan’s theory of the libido (in his earlier seminars Lacan sees libido as it “is inscribed in the imaginary,” while in *Écrits* libido “is in direct contact with the real”). Lacan, *Écrits* 719, 718; Lacan, *Seminar, Book II* 326.

\(^{89}\) Lacan, *Seminar, Book III* 145. Imaginary recognition must be distinguished from symbolic recognition since the former alone does not prevent the “primitive paranoid dialectic of identification with the counterpart” from ending in a brutal destruction of the ego. Although the (inherently defensive) process of subjectivity production springs from the Imaginary logic of perceived similarity and dissimilarity, the Symbolic equips the subject with a more delicate mechanism of subjectivity production: “[The] rivalrous and competitive ground for the foundation of the object is precisely what is overcome in [the Symbolic] insofar as this involves a third party” – a signifier. The function of the third party is to sanction the ego in its ideal form, that is, to recognize the subject as complete. Lacan, *Seminar, Book III* 39.

\(^{90}\) Psychotics, for instance, are apt at mirroring the behavior of others and thus are able to function in society without enduring a psychotic episode for quite some time. See Burns; Gherovici and Steinkoler.
Whereas it is possible to give a superficial explanation of family dynamics in such terms, on the level of collective identity one would run into serious problems. Assuming an idea that people seek literal approval, or seek to conform to social standards, shuts down any opportunity to resist. Moreover, identification by imitation exhausts itself fairly quickly, as soon as the subject fails to prop up his/her likeness with the other, and therefore precludes the subject from making complex and durable social connections. The Symbolic as culture or a dimension of the pleasure principle, however, presupposes the subject’s affective investment in a limitless range of heterogeneous objects (as I explain, those are part-objects of the objet a), rather than into a limited/limiting mechanism of perceived resemblances.

2.4 The Neurotic Structure of National Subjectivity

The social, or relational, aspect of the mirror stage and its effects in the Imaginary, however, is unable to explain the phenomena of collective identity fully. Only by conceiving the subject as a successful confluence of the Imaginary and the Symbolic is Lacan’s theory capable of explaining national subjectivity as a type of ideological animated collective identity. Unlike the ambiguous and chaotic imaginary relation toward the other which shapes the subject’s sociality, the Symbolic is governed by the law of castration and as such can be discussed in terms of culture. This culture is not a culture of the subject’s enlightened attitude to others (such as comic melancholy), but a culture of mutual recognition, or reciprocal determination of each other

---

91 In Lacanian psychoanalysis the term “social” can refer to a relational aspect of the Imaginary, as well as emphasize an ideological aspect of collective identity (for example, in such phrases as “social link,” “ideology as a social bond”). In its latter usage, the concept of the social is not limited to the Imaginary.

92 Lacan offers a tripartite structure of the human condition: the Real as naure, the Imaginary as society, and the Symbolic as culture.
– both differentially and affectively, discussed below as intersubjectivity: “[The Symbolic] is always a pact, an agreement, people get on with one another, they agree - this is yours, this is mine, this is this, that is that.”  And as the ego finds its support in the structure of the Symbolic, the subject transforms from “the dummy” into “the true subject.”

The structure of the neurotic qua true subject as the one who, unlike the psychotic and the pervert, completes a proper transition to the Symbolic via the stages of alienation and separation, is the structure of the ideologically inspirited subject. Since in Chapter Four I argue that fascist narratives are the neurotic’s fantasy, rather than something pathological, a brief look into the mechanism of the neurotic’s subjectivity construction is a must. Unable to achieve the mythical pre-natal wholeness in the mirror stage, the neurotic subject eventually attempts to support the idea of the (complete) self by symbolic means: he/she gets named, or represented by a signifier in relation to the Name-of-the-Father – the primordial signifier that anchors all signifiers within the symbolic field. The price of such representation is castration – the subject’s abdication of the sought-after fullness, or unrestrained jouissance: “Castration means that jouissance has to be refused in order to be attained on the inverse scale of the Law of desire.”

Governed by the castrating “No!” of the Father, the subject of desire is allowed to enjoy as little and safely as possible, although keeping the (however illusory) promise of ultimate jouissance alive. The neurotic subject thus operates along “the law of feeling good,” or the pleasure principle, which precludes otherwise deadly jouissance from reaching its goal: “pleasure’s law [is] such as to make [desire] always fall short of its aim: the homeostasis of the living being, always too quickly reestablished at the lowest threshold of tension….”

95 Lacan, Écrits 700.
The price of the Symbolic does not only entail the renunciation of the ultimate, raw jouissance, but also a further alienation of the subject. In addition to primary alienation in the imaginary other, the neurotic subject moves further away from him/herself, being a product of the Other of language: “Alienation consists in this vel, which…condemns the subject to appearing only in that division [when]…if [the subject] appears on one side as meaning, produced by the signifier, it appears on the other as aphanisis.” Simultaneously, this vel, this puncture in the Symbolic, that is, to the ultimate impossibility for the subject to fully match his/her name, to be pure, absolute being, is what the neurotic owns his/her subjectivity to: “we…must bring everything back to the cut qua function in discourse, the most significant being the cut that constitutes a bar between the signifier and the signified….This cut in the signifying chain alone verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the real.”

The subject, however, is not totally determined by the differential structure of the Symbolic. In the process of separation, the neurotic recognizes, albeit unconsciously, that the Other which, “[marks the subject’s] place in the field of the group’s relations, between each individual and all the others,” is actually lacking. Since the signifier as it represents the subject to all other signifiers (and thereby other subjects) fails to determine the subject’s meaning unequivocally, the subject is left to speculate what it is in him/her that brings him/her to a certain relation to other subjects. At this point, rather than the differential mechanism of the Symbolic, the work of which is manifested in the process of alienation, the affective function of the Symbolic, more specifically, the subject’s desire comes to the fore of the present discussion.

97 In Lacan’s psychoanalysis the raw or Real jouissance is pre-Symbolic, while the phallic jouissance is whatever left for the speaking subject to enjoy in the process of courting the impossible object – the objet a.
The most fundamental element of the neurotic’s affective economy is the mysterious and fleeting objet a. It is the sought-after impossible truth or essence; the radical identity wholeness; as well as the locus of lack. The objet a is situated at the very center of the process of subjectivity production in general, and national identity construction in particular. It is around the objet a that the national subject structures its desire for the perfect national self, or crafts its national fantasy/attitude. Considering the focal position of the concept of the objet a for the purposes of offering a Lacanian-Burkean account of national identity construction, I will linger on the topic of the objet a, its place in the formula of the subject, as well as the related concepts of symptom, fantasy, and frame, which are all instrumental in the analysis of the psychorhetorical narratives of Russian neo-fascists, Nashi, Antifa and Putin.

2.4.1 The Formula of the Subject

Marked in Lacan’s theoretization by the symbol $ as the self disquieted by the real lack arising from the original discord between the Innenwelt and the Umwelt, the subject enters in a relation with the unary signifier S1. The first signifier is what Lacan calls a “single stroke.” To elucidate the concept, Lacan tells a story about a notch made by a prehistoric hunter presumably on the wall of his/her cave to mark his/her first kill. It is:

by means of [this notch representing the first kill he did] will not become confused in his memory when he has killed ten others. He will not have to remember which is which, and it is by means of this single stroke that he will count them....When this signifier, this one, is established—the reckoning is one one. It is at the level, not of the one, but of the one, at the level of the
reckoning, that the subject has to situate himself as such. In this respect, the two ones are already distinguished.\textsuperscript{101}

A proper name is another example of the function of the unary signifier. There is no necessary link between the subject and the unary signifier that the former is named by, since “in its dimension as a pure signifier,” or in isolation from other signifiers, the unary signifier bears no meaning on its own, it “signifies nothing.”\textsuperscript{102} This relationship is not of imaginary resemblances either, although it is perceived by the tragic subject as such. Whatever sensibly literal connection exists in the imaginary link between the infant and his/her mirror image qua mother, in the Symbolic it is exceeded by the figurative – metonymical and metaphorical – relation between the subject, the unary signifier and the binary signifier.\textsuperscript{103}

Marked by the originary meaninglessness of the unary signifier (the fact that produces the second lack or radical dissonance between the Symbolic and the Real), the subject acquires his/her subjectivity, or meaning, only in connection to another signifier, or the “binary signifier” S2.\textsuperscript{104} This is why Lacan defines a signifier as that “which represents a subject...for another signifier” that represents another subject.\textsuperscript{105} The link between the unary signifier S1 and the binary signifier S2 is metonymic, while the subject that is represented by the juxtaposition of S1

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{101} Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XI} 141.
    \item \textsuperscript{102} Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book III} 250, 185. As Lacan elaborates, “[t]o think is to substitute the word elephant for elephants, and a ring for the sun. You realise of course that there is an abyss between this thing which is phenomenologically the sun - the centre of which runs through the world of appearances, the unity of light - and a ring. And even if one spans it, what progress is there over animal intelligence? None. Because the sun in so far as it is designated by a ring is valueless. It only has a value in so far as this ring is placed in relation with other formalisations, which constitute with it this symbolic whole within which it has its place.... The symbol only has value if it is organised in a world of symbols.” Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book I} 225.
    \item \textsuperscript{103} Following alienation of the subject from himself, the subject gets separated from his jouissance by the objet a: “the more developed [or figurative] this object [of the subject’s desire] becomes, the more profoundly the subject becomes [separated] from his jouissance” and its destructive effects. As the subject becomes invested in something other than his specular image, or perceived similarity with the mother, he can maintain the constitutive split between the self and the other without either shattering the ego or extinguishing desire and therefore canceling his being. Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 208. On the discussion of the figurative in Lacan’s theory, see Chaitlin.
    \item \textsuperscript{104} Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XI} 219. S2 simultaneously functions as a “single stroke” that marks another subject.
    \item \textsuperscript{105} Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 198.
\end{itemize}
and S2 is metaphoric. The Symbolic thus is engendered in an incessant metonymic movement of signifiers, which transiently halts at some point (point de capiton) to congeal into a metaphor, thereupon producing a relatively stable formation of the subject’s meaning.\textsuperscript{106}

Despite the fact that Burke’s metonymy as reduction differs in nuance from Lacan’s metonymy as juxtaposition, for both scholars “metonymy is an impoverished metaphor…[or that] metonymy exists from the beginning and makes metaphor possible.”\textsuperscript{107} Lacan and Burke conclude that language and thus the subject are metaphoric, since metaphor permits us to speak about things in terms of what they are not (and consequently, to use the unary signifier as a mark of the subject):

\textsuperscript{106} The point at which meaning is produced what Lacan calls the point de capiton, or the button tie, the quilting point, in its synchronic function. As such it differ from the quilting point understood diachronically” The diachronic function of this button tie can be found in a sentence, insofar as a sentence closes its signification only with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction constituted by the other terms and, inversely, sealing their meaning by its retroactive effect. But the synchronic structure is more hidden, and it is this structure that brings us to the beginning. It is metaphor insofar as the first attribution [of the signified to the signifier] is constituted in it…. “As a function of punctuation, the point de capiton is one of a few Lacanian concepts that comprise the methodological apparatus of the present analysis. Lacan, Écrits 682.

\textsuperscript{107} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 223. Burke too situates the tropes of metonymy and metaphor in the center of his theory: “Language develops by metaphorical extension, in borrowing words from the realm of the corporeal, visible, tangible and applying them by analogy to the realm of the incorporeal, invisible, intangible; then in the course of time, the original corporeal reference is forgotten, and only the incorporeal, metaphorical extension survives (often because the very conditions of living that reminded one of the corporeal reference have so altered that the cross reference no longer exists with near the same degree of apparentness in the “objective situation” itself); and finally, poets regain the original relation, in reverse, by a “metaphorical extension” back from the intangible into a tangible equivalent (the first “carrying-over” from the material to the spiritual being compensated by a second “carrying-over” from the spiritual back into the material): and this “archaicizing” device we call “metonymy.” Burke too highlights the literal and figurative logics of the Imaginary and the Symbolic at large: culture is produced “figuratively of terms originally grounded in reference to the nonsymbolic realm of motion. Otherwise put: the realm of what is usually called ‘ideas’ is constructed of symbolic material usually called sensory ‘images.’ The Self, like its corresponding Culture, thus has two sources of reference for its symbolic identity: its nature as a physiological organism, and its nature as a symbol-using animal responsive to the potentialities of symbolicity that have a nature of their own not reducible to a sheerly physiological dimension.” Although fairly distinct from Lacan’s account of the Imaginary as the locus of the mirror stage and the Symbolic as the locus of the Oedipal complex, important correspondences are obvious. Both Burke and Lacan point out that the Imaginary as a collection of sensory images is directed the subject, yet in somewhat ambiguous way, toward the Real. The Imaginary, as Lacan elaborates, functions as a primitive defensive mechanism against the first lack. As the subject is incepted in the Symbolic, or culture, through the metonymic “carrying-over” of signifiers, he becomes a metaphor. As a topological construct, the subject is ever “more profoundly… alienated from his jouissance” as a sense of the mythical antenatal unity. Burke, Grammar of Motives 506; Burke, “(Nonsymbolic) Motion” 815; Lacan, Écrits 208.
whatever correspondence there is between a word and the thing it names, the word is not the thing….And just as effects that can be got with the word can’t be got with the thing, so effects that can be got with the word can’t be got with the thing. But because two realms coincide so usefully at certain points, we tend to overlook the areas where they radically diverge. We gravitate spontaneously towards naïve verbal realism.\(^\text{108}\)

In anticipation of my discussion of modes of enjoyment of national unity, I point out that, by taking the national self literally, the national subject adopts a tragic attitude toward itself.\(^\text{109}\)

Tragic literality, however, differs from a sensibly literal connection that exists between the subject and his/her mirror image, which I discussed several pages ago, just as there is a disparity between how the neurotic and the psychotic respond to will for jouissance. In psychosis the subject’s quest for literality is unsupported symbolically and thus ends in disintegration of the self, while tragic literality secures the neurotic in his/her purported awareness of the united self. The sensible literality of the Imaginary must be distinguished from tragic literality of the Symbolic also in a sense that in the Imaginary the subject mistakenly takes an image of the other for its own, while in the Symbolic the subject identifies with the unary signifier as it set against the binary signifier of the other. Although in both cases the subject depends on the other, in the second case the reliance on the other is affectively productive.

Here I must draw attention to Lacan’s formula of the subject \(\frac{S_1}{S} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}\) (which is also instrumental to the upcoming discussion of the objet a and the four Discourses) and its modification \(\frac{S_1}{S} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{-S}\). The right side of the formula, governed by S2, stands for everything

\(^{108}\) Burke, Rhetoric of Religion 18.

\(^{109}\) When discussing “an inherent tragically ethical dimension” of ideology, Žižek refers to ideology that does not maintain a cynical distance to itself, in other words, that takes itself literally. Žižek, “For They Know Not What They Do” 187.
exterior that is simultaneously internal to the subject, or points to the subject’s essential intersubjectivity (or “the intimate exteriority or ‘extimacy’” of the subject).\textsuperscript{110} S2 is a signifier of the space that can be occupied by anybody (or rather a sensory image of any real body) who is not the subject:\textsubscript{\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{S2}}} : “The human being poses the day as such, and the day thereby becomes presence of the day - against a background that is not a background of concrete nighttime, but of possible absence of daytime.”\textsuperscript{111} Similarly, the national subject can only be conceived symbolically, or negatively: “it is through the exchange of symbols that we locate our different selves in relation to one another.”\textsuperscript{112} –\$ is the space where the national subject does not equal itself, it is the location of the subject’s absence.

An account of the primary narcissism ravaging the ego and the pacifying intersubjectivity of the Symbolic expressed in the dynamics of the subject’s absence/presence allows seeing the national other as nothing but a means to sustain an appeasing image of the national self (which could be referred to as the “ego” of the nation). The concept of intersubjectivity then is somewhat different from Burke’s concept of consubstantiality. As Burke explains, “[i]n being identified with B, A is ‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he/she remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he/she is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another.”\textsuperscript{113}

Speaking in terms of the present discussion of nationhood, Burke’s concept of identification as “an acting-together (to produce new “common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make [people] consubstantial”) emphasizes cooperation among people who imagine they belong to one nation. The concept of intersubjectivity as a symbolic connection

\textsuperscript{110} Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 139.
\textsuperscript{111} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 148.
\textsuperscript{112} Lacan, Seminar, Book I 140.
\textsuperscript{113} Burke, Rhetoric of Motives 21.
between the national self and the national other explicates that the process of national identity construction occurs, more broadly speaking, in the presence and often at the expense of the national other. In other words, Burke’s concept of consubstantiality underscores partnership among those who supposedly belong to one nation, while Lacan’s theory of the subject stresses that the search for autonomy and certainty of the national self involves a fellow human being, who is usually treated with suspicion and resentment. The difference between Burke’s consubstantiality and Lacan’s intersubjectivity can be also viewed in terms of comic and tragic identity construction: consubstantiality spotlights the potential for comedy in the process of national identity negotiation and intersubjectivity points to the possibility of tragic enjoyment of the national self. While the comic national subject builds its identity around the objet a as certain national values, which interpellate some national subjects, rather than others, the tragic national subject sustains itself only negatively – by rejecting the national other for being, as Russian neo-fascists have it, “incompatib[le] [in character] and blood.” This tragic negativity of assuming a pleasing vision of the self by renouncing the national other for the latter is supposedly implicated in the loss of the objet a, however, has to be differentiated from the structural negativity of the subject, who, in absence of its truth, or essence, that is, due to its innate lack, gets to know what it is, what it desires only by accounting for the desire of the national other.

As such Lacan’s concept of intersubjectivity and Burke’s notion of consubstantiality complement each other allowing to discuss the process of Russian national identity construction as negotiation. The type of negotiation in question, however, is not a conscious act of mutual cooperation, but an unconscious, formal dependency of the national subject on its symbolic position among other national fantasies. Any instance of social cooperation then can be viewed as an extension of speech as the locus of subjectivity constitution. Speech, generally speaking, is

---

114 Demushkin n.pag.
moved by an unconscious appeal to the other– summoning of the other for the sake of constituting the self.\textsuperscript{115} In this respect, the historic legend of summoning of the Scandinavian princes by the Russian people to build the first Russian state, which I briefly recount in Chapter Three, can be read as a myth of structural intersubjectivity constitutive of national identity.

Heralded into language by the unary signifier, the subject cannot perceive the Real and him/herself qua body in the Real directly, or literally (hence the bar between $ and S1 in Lacan’s formula of the subject $\frac{S1}{S} \rightarrow \frac{S2}{a}$). As an effect of the second lack and consequently desire, the subject is split between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, or what the subject knows he/she is (a narcissistically fueled idea of the self) and what he/she is (an intersubjective tropological construct): the subject is “a perspective …from which the subject will see himself…as others see him – which will enable him to support himself in a dual situation that is satisfactory for him from the point of view of love.”\textsuperscript{116} To mask the split between the Imaginary and the Symbolic the subject resorts to fantasy. Fantasy equips the subject with “a certain construction of his autonomy” as a product of “the symbolic chain that binds and orients [the subject’s self-awareness].”\textsuperscript{117} Just as Lacan’s fantasy “yields us the entire world system,” so Burke’s attitude shapes the subject’s “notion of the universe or history.”\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{115} Both Lacan and Burke express this point of view. Lacan insists that “there is no speech without a reply, even if it is only met with silence.” Similarly, Burke argues that “[i]n its essence communication involves the use of verbal symbols for purposes of appeal.” Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 206; Burke, \textit{Rhetoric of Motives} 271.

\textsuperscript{116} Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 268.


\textsuperscript{118} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 177; Burke, \textit{Attitudes toward History} 3.
2.5 Fantasy as an Attitude of the National Subject

Fantasy, or, in Burke’s terms, an attitude, is ultimately a misrepresentation (méconnaissance) of the complete self: “In the pursuit of this beyond, which is nothing, [the subject] harks back to the feeling of a being with self-consciousness which is nothing but its own reflection in the world of things.” But this misrepresentation is the only possible reality of the speaking subject. Extending Lacan’s concept of fantasy and Burke’s corresponding notion of attitude to the context of national identity construction, one can say that national identity is an all-encompassing attitude toward or fantasmatic narrative about the national self and the national other. Such a view on national identity problematizes Ernest Gellner’s and Eric Hobsbawm’s theories of the nation as false consciousness and an ideological illusion respectively, but confirms Benedict Anderson’s argument about the nation as an imaginary community. National fantasy is neither Gellner’s and Hobsbawm’s repressed delusion masterfully crafted to hide the supposed real essence of the nation, nor, as mentioned in Chapter One, Bormann’s conscious “fanciful invention about events not in the here and now.” Instead, national fantasy is a constitutive response to the traumatic negativity of the national subject encountered in the space between the Real as sensible and the Real as the impossible: “The function of the tuché, of the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma.”

Conceived as split within the double aspect of language – its unconscious symbolic structure and conscious manifestations in the Imaginary – the subject, as noted above, is not a

---

120 Gunn, “Refitting Fantasy” 5.
solely discursive product. The subject is what he/she fantasizes he/she is; that is, a comforting idea of certainty as a defensive response to the Real: “The place of the real…stretches from the trauma to the [f]antasy - in so far as the [f]antasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primary.”122 While the mirror stage initiates the subject’s defense from the sensible Real, the Symbolic provides the subject with means to defend him/herself from traumatic lack: the Symbolic shields the subject from the Real as the sensible by setting him/her in figurative, rather than sensibly literal relation to the desired unity. Although the Symbolic manages to protect the subject from the primary traumatic encounter with the Real as the sensible, it nevertheless cannot fully safeguard the subject from the effects of the Real as the impossible. In other word, the subject hides from his/her constitutive lack in his/her fantasy/attitude, which, however, is not an impenetrable wall that divides the subject from the Real. Now and then the Real reminds us of itself “by the accident, the noise, the small element of [the Real], which is evidence that we are not dreaming.”123

As the Imaginary emphasizes the role of the Real as the sensible (or the real lack, the inability to match the demand of need), the concept of the Symbolic highlights the Real as “recalcitrant,” as “this obstacle, this hitch” (or the second lack).124 It is in this sense the Real is impossible: “the real is the impossible…[n]ot in the name of a simple obstacle we hit our heads up against, but in the name of the logical obstacle of what, in the symbolic, declares itself to be impossible.”125 The second lack, or the fact that the Real cannot be fully represented in language, is traumatic too. Considering the notions of the Real as the sensible and the Real as the

122 Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 60.
123 Ibid.
124 Burke, Permanence and Change 257; Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 54. In Permanence and Change Burke discusses the non-discursive and discursive “orders of recalcitrance”: “the recalcitrance of the material” and “the recalcitrance of social relationships, political exigencies, economic procedures.” Burke, Permanence and Change 257, 255, 258.
125 Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 123.
impossible, the national subject is a history of defensive accommodation (Imaginary in impulse and Symbolic in execution) of traumatic tension brought about by the two lacks.

2.6 The Objet a and Symptoms

The ideas of lack and fantasy/attitude are closely connected with the concept of the *objet a*. Lacan introduces the concept of the *objet a* by drawing his readers’ attention to the *fort/da* game of the child as a “repetitive [exercise] in which subjectivity simultaneously masters its dereliction [(or incompleteness)] and gives birth to the symbol.”

By throwing a wooden reel and pulling it back by the string it was attached to and exclaiming *fort* and *da*, the child reenacts the presence and absence of the mother. The child “compensated himself [or herself] for [the separation with the real mother],” as it were, by staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his [or her] reach.” As Lacan clarifies, the reel, however, does not stand for the child’s mother as such, but is connected with an idea of the external, missing object that can supposedly complete the subject. Just as the mother, or rather her mirror image, although literally, served to provide the subject with a rudimentary sense of the self, the reel stands for the *objet a* that promises to make the subject whole. The *fort/da* game demonstrates how the Symbolic is much more than the differential mechanism of subjectivity production: it comes to possess an affective dimension. In the differential play of signifiers there is always something left undetermined, unsaid, something that moves the subject to keep looking for the answer.

Lacan expresses this process in the formula of the neurotic’s fundamental fantasy $\emptyset a$, which reads as “the subject longs for *jouissance* that is ‘[replaced] by an instrument’,” that is, the

---

subject desires identity fullness, for which the objet a is a stand in.\textsuperscript{128} The formula of the fundamental fantasy is, in its turn, a part of Lacan’s formula of the subject $\frac{S_1}{S} \to \frac{S_2}{a}$, which subsumes both the differential and affective aspect of the Symbolic. The place that the objet a occupies in Lacan’s formula of the subject $\frac{S_1}{S} \to \frac{S_2}{a}$ (the bottom right position) is the place where the subject’s life force, or desire qua will to jouissance, siphons through. And it is not an accident that the objet a and the subject’s aphanisis, represented by $-S$, are located in the same place – in the right bottom corner of Lacan’s formula of the subject $\frac{S_1}{S} \to \frac{S_2}{-S/a}$\textsuperscript{129} Both are marks of the subjective void, or lack.

The objet a, or “the cause of desire,…[which] manifests itself as want-to-be,” is the mechanism of subjective enjoyment.\textsuperscript{130} Constitutive articulation of the subject fueled by the objet a is a compromise between the principles of perfection as the death drive and the pleasure principle. As such it functions as a cause of an endless parade of “part-objects,” “signifying objects”: “it is of this [enjoyment of the complete self] that all the forms of the object a…are the representatives, the equivalents.”\textsuperscript{131} Strictly speaking, part-objects do not represent the objet a, as it is nothing but a place of lack, masked as loss that gets provisionally recuperated by part-objects. Part-objects are rather an “exponent of a function [of the objet a], a function that sublimes [the objet a] even before it exercises the function; this function is that of the index

\textsuperscript{128} Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 653. As noted, Lacan conceives of libido as an organ-instrument. Moreover, Lacan reveals that libido qua organ is exactly the objet a – something that separates itself off at the birth of the speaking subject. As such it is a mysterious organ that needs no body to exist, but which the subject considers to be instrumental to his/her enjoyment and therefore strives to capture it. See Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XI} 196-200.

\textsuperscript{129} The speaking subject is never what he/she says he/she is: he/she is never the sought-after essence (a) of him/herself. Thus a is a “no being,” which is the same as the Absolute Being, both marked by -$S$.

\textsuperscript{130} Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XVII} 151.

raised toward an absence….”¹³² The objet a is an index of desire or a place from which the originary negativity of subjectivity is converted into positivity of the subject’s reality.

The subject confuses satisfaction provided by part-objects with pre-Symbolic jouissance. In this sense the objet a can be understood as surplus jouissance or pleasure unaccounted for by part-objects. To put it otherwise, the objet a extends an offer of jouissance that the subject is always supposed to refuse by saying “that’s not it,” that the offered object always falls short.¹³³ That is how the objet a is able to keep part-objects far enough to suggest the forthcoming pleasure of identity wholeness and close enough to preserve the minimal degree of lack.

Operating along the pleasure principle, the objet a is able to sustain the subject’s desire: “At the moment of climax [jouissance], [desire] would simply be out of the picture if fantasy did not intervene to sustain it with the very discord to which it succumbs.”¹³⁴

For the purposes of the discussion of national identity construction, it is especially important to emphasize that the objet a is an extimate element – something that is both external to the subject and intimate, or, in Lacan’s words, “something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me.”¹³⁵ As Lacan repeats it over and over again in his seminars, the objet a as the Other’s desire is what the subject desires too:

[d]esire is first grasped in the other, and in the most confused form. The relativity of human desire in relation to the desire of the other is what we recognise in every reaction of rivalry, of competition, and even in the entire development of

---

¹³² Lacan, Écrits 571.
¹³³ According to Lacan, “that’s not it” should always be an answer to a demand for satisfaction: “Object a is the void presupposed by a demand, and it is only by situating demand via metonymy, that is, by the pure continuity assured from the beginning to the end of a sentence, that we can imagine a desire that is based on no being - a desire without any other substance than that assured by knots themselves. Enunciating that sentence, ‘I ask you to refuse what I offer you’, I could only motivate it by the ‘that’s not it’ that I took up again last time. ‘That’s not it’ means that, in the desire of every demand, there is but the request for object a, for the object that could satisfy jouissance.” Lacan, Seminar, Book XX 126.
civilization….The subject originally locates and recognises desire through the intermediary, not only of his own image, but of the body of his fellow being. It’s exactly at that moment that the human being’s consciousness, in the form of consciousness of self, distinguishes itself. It is in so far as he recognises his desire in the body of the other that the exchange takes place. It is in so far as his desire has gone over to the other side that he assimilates himself to the body of the other and recognises himself as body.136

In other words, the subject learns to desire only in the presence of another speaking and thus desiring subject.

In this respect the objet a functions as a liaison between the subject and the Other as a another desiring, or speaking, being: “The dialectic of the objects of desire, in so far as it creates the link between the desire of the subject and the desire of the Other—I have been telling you for a long time now that it is one and the same—this dialectic now passes through the fact that the desire is not replied to directly.”137 The subject is destined to be searching for the objet a as an answer to the question of his/her own desire in “an echo that [it] sets off in the Other,” which is paradoxically phased as “Che vuoi?” - “What do you, the Other, want from me?”138 Speaking in Burke’s terms, in attributing certain motives to the desiring other, the subject reveals his/her own specific motives. The objet a then coincides with the moment of interpellation when the neurotic recognizes a certain connection, or what Lacan calls a social link (lien social), between him/herself and the other, whose question the neurotic assumes to be directed at him/her.139 The neurotic’s attitude to lack and the objet a thus allows him/her to become a part of “ideology as a

139 Lacan, Seminar, Book XX 17.
social bond.”¹⁴⁰ In contrast, the pathological subjects – the psychotic and the pervert – struggle to come to terms with lack and thereby an idea of otherness, which is crucial in establishing ideological commitment to certain national images. The psychotic does not even consider the question of lack, while the pervert is aware of lack, but refuses to renounce the complete, uncompromised *jouissance* of the self.

As soon as the place of lack is occupied by the *objet a*, the latter simultaneously becomes the locus of symptoms as enigma of the subject’s substantial lack:

A symptom here is the signifier of a signified that has been repressed from the subject’s consciousness. A symbol written in the sand of the flesh and on the veil of Maia, it partakes of language by the semantic ambiguity that I have already highlighted in its constitution. But it is fully functioning speech, for it includes the other’s discourses in the secret of its cipher [*chiffre*].¹⁴¹

Symptom qua *chiffre* is what the subject always misrecognizes in his/her desire. Symptom as this cryptic element “give[s] to this $ something which will alleviate the part of it which sustains the presence of the [*objet a*]….something which the subject can hold onto,” since “the [*objet a*] is no being” at all and the part-object is its trace.¹⁴² In other words, symptom is an element that makes the vision of the subject in possession of certain part-objects enjoyable. As “the signification [or product] of repression,” symptom is an element of the subject’s consciousness and radically separated from the unconscious dimension of its articulation and the *objet a*: “As with all the other unconscious processes, nothing…reaches the level of consciousness....”¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Lacan, *Seminar, Book I* 195; Lacan, *Seminar, Book VII* 32. The conscious and the unconscious are divided also in a sense that “[o]n the unconscious side of things, there is no resistance, there is only a tendency to repeat”. Lacan, *Seminar, Book II* 321.
products of affectively driven signification, part-objects can be said to be on the same side as symptoms. While, as Lacan’s psychoanalysis evolved, the discussion of part-objects was limited to the consideration of the four partial objects (the voice, the gaze, the breast and faeces), in this work I hold to a more general understanding of part-objects as objects in which the subject misrecognizes the cause of his/her desire – the objet a. In this sense both part-objects and symptoms are elements that make up the subject’s méconnaissance, which gives me an opportunity to treat the former as symptomatic. In other words, I understand symptom as a compound concept, which does not only stand for that which prevents the national subject from enjoying itself to the fullest (and this function is often attituted to the national other), but also includes that which promises the national subject its wholeness.

Such dual nature of symptom is reminiscent of the imaginary mechanism of the subject’s vacillation between the ideal image of the self and the foreign image of the other. Just as the subject (mis)recognizes him/herself in the image of another human being, so, speaking in terms of the Symbolic and from the point of view of national identity construction, the national subject gets to know what it wants to be or rather it is (which is the same) only in relation to the national other: “[i]t is in the other, by [par] the other, that desire is named. It enters into the symbolic relation of I and you, in a relation of mutual recognition and transcendence.”¹⁴⁴ To invoke Burke’s idea of the cycle of guilt/pollution (or the lacking self), purification (from one’s own mistakes or, more frequently, the other) and redemption (of the perfect self), purification as a mechanism of the subject’s enjoyment results in a symptomatic redemption of the ideal national self often at the expense of the national other.¹⁴⁵ The lacking nature of the national subject, which can be understood both in terms of depravity and contamination, is emphasized in the

¹⁴⁴ Lacan, Seminar, Book I 177.
¹⁴⁵ Burke’s guilt is Lacan’s lack: given the impossibility to fully represent the non-discursive by discursive means, the subject is ridden with “categorical Guilt.” Burke, Permanence and Change 278.
Discourse of the Hysteric and the apocalyptic character of the tragic national vision (all of which I will discuss later in this chapter).

The myth of the apocalyptic regeneration highlights the symptomatic character of the tragic national fantasy. The apocalyptic national narrative owns its consistency and, more so, its very existence to the national symptom – the national other. The latter, speaking in Burke’s terms, pollutes the national subject constraining its “true” potential. Remarkably, having conceived of the national enemy as a force from the outside, more precisely, the force that must be held accountable for the national subject’s imperfections, the national subject is able to see itself as always already ideal. And the symptomatic analysis of such dynamics constitutes the first step of a psycho-rhetorical reading of national fantasy.

It is important to stress that the national subject thinks of itself (the ego) as the already ideal self (the ideal ego) since there is somebody else to take all the blame for everything less than ideal in him. As we shall see in the upcoming analysis, most national narratives in Russia are permeated by longing for political, military, economic, moral and physical greatness. Yet, at the same time there was almost no moment in the history of the Russian idea (which I discuss in Chapter Three) when most national subjects thought of Russia as less than prominent. There was always the national other (most recently the national other has been predominantly the West, including the U.S. and countries of Western Europe) whose presence simultaneously amplified and resolved Russia’s national desire.

To sum up briefly, the objet a is what sets the mechanism of affective signification in motion, and symptom is a product of signification, presented in cryptic form. Although the objet a and symptom are not the same concepts, they are all in one place – they occupy the place of the

\[146\] A possible exception, perhaps, was the 1990s due to the traumatic outcome of Russian neo-liberal reforms.
subject’s truth: “It is the truth of what his desire has been in his history that the subject cries out through his symptom.”

Lack (the signifier of which is the objet a) stems from the disparity between the non-discursive and the discursive and incites the subject’s desire to close this gap. The ultimate impossibility of such operation is traumatic and therefore removed from the subject’s consciousness. The repressed, “censored” truth of the subject’s lack returns as symptom.

Lacan’s concepts of lack, desire, the objet a, and symptom, as well as Burke’s principle of perfection and the cycle of guilt-purification-redemption, help theorize the subject ontologically, epistemologically and ethically. Ontologically speaking, the subject maneuvers defensively and thus constitutively between the Real as the sensible and the Real as the impossible in pursuit of certainty. From an epistemological point of view, a conscious idea is an idea that the subject has of others and therefore of himself: what the subject “[heard] and [said], in her own way,… [is] her symptom.” However, what the subject knows of him/herself is not the subject himself: who the subject knows “is something else – a particular object within the experience of the subject.” This particular object qua ego is a stand-in for the objet a, a place or a signifier of lack, which compulsively perpetuates the subject’s action or unwitting movement toward certainty.

The corresponding notions of Burke’s action and Lacan’s psychoanalytic act are ethical concepts, since action/act “involves character, which involves choice; and the form of choice attains its perfection in the distinction between Yes and No.” As I explain below, when discussing a symbolic strategy of the obsessive neurotic, this choice, however cynical it may be,

---

147 Lacan, Écrits 413.
150 Lacan, Seminar, Book II 44.
151 Burke, Rhetoric of Religion 41.
is not necessarily a conscious action, which makes it no less a matter of ethics. The action/act in question is an act of speech, since only by speaking can the subject gain an idea of him/herself and his/her relation to the other: “speech is the founding medium of the intersubjective relation, and what retroactively modifies the two subjects. It is speech which, literally, creates what installs them in that dimension of being I try to get you to glimpse.”¹⁵² This dimension of being or meaning, as Lacan insists, is the space of truth: “[meaning] is not that it is affirmed as truth, but rather that it introduces the dimension of truth into the real.”¹⁵³ The above consideration of concepts of action/act, choice, and truth lead me directly into a discussion of Lacan’s and Burke’s ethics as they meld together to generate robust conversations about ideology, in general, and a rewarding discussion of national identity construction, in particular.

2.7 Attitude and Fantasy-Frames: A Lacanian-Burkean Ethical Framework

As I hinted throughout the chapter, lacking certainty and thus chasing after it, the national subject has no choice but to make a choice of an attitude, which endows him with some idea of unity.¹⁵⁴ Stated otherwise, the national subject acts, and this action, according to Lacan and Burke, occurs in the space between tragedy and comedy. Despite the terminological mismatch between Lacan’s and Burke’s tragedy and comedy (what Lacan calls tragedy is Burke’s comedy, while Lacan’s comedy corresponds with Burke’s tragedy), both ethical accounts of the subject

¹⁵² Lacan, Seminar, Book I 274.
¹⁵³ Lacan, Seminar, Book I 263.
¹⁵⁴ As Burke has it, “[t]he symbolic act is the dancing of an attitude.” Both Lacan and Burke insists that there is no action without motion, although the former is not reducible to the latter: “If I walk up and down here while speaking to you, that does not constitute an act, but if one day it is to cross a certain threshold by which I put myself outside the law, that day my motor activity will have a value of an act.” It is also important to note, that a psychoanalytic act should not be understood in a common legal sense as something that the subject is aware of and thus can be punished for. An act is both conscious and unconscious. Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form 9; Lacan, Seminar, Book XV 15.
are surprisingly similar. Lacan’s comedy and Burke’s tragedy comprise what I call a tragic ethical category of the national fantasy as a flight from the unredeemable uncertainty of the human condition: “life slips away, runs off, escapes all those barriers that oppose it, including precisely those that are the most essential, those that are constituted by the agency of the signifier.”

Tragic national narratives mitigate the traumatic effects of the Real as the sensible (the tension between the subject’s Innenwelt and the Umwelt) and the Real as the impossible (the incompatibility between the Real and the signifier) by consuming the least ethical energy to sustain the national self as ideal. Tragic attitude is a question of “[the] fundamental failure of [action] to catch up with [desire],” a failed attempt to recognize the nature of desire as always hungry for something else. In this sense, tragic national fantasy is what Burke refers to as “the attitude of ‘happy stupidity’ whereby the gravity of life fails to register.”

A traumatic effect of lack brought about by the Real as the sensible and the Real as the impossible is a source of paranoia: “[When] the subject makes himself an object by striking a pose before the mirror, he/she could not possibly be satisfied with it, since even if he/she achieved his/her most perfect likeness in that image, it would still be the jouissance of the other that he/she would cause to be recognized in it.” Aggressive and ruthless instances of national tragedy as remnants of the primal narcissism are directed toward masking the nation’s substantial

---

155 Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 314. From here onward, when I refer to Lacan’s comedy and Burke’s tragedy I speak of tragedy, and when I discuss comedy I imply both Lacan’s tragedy and Burke’s comedy. I side with Burke’s terminology as it is applied to national ethical positions for two reasons: first, to avoid confusion when discussing national narratives symptomatically – by analyzing tragic, comic, epic, elegiac, satiric, the burlesque, and the grotesque frames; second, to acknowledge the contribution of Burke’s theory to the present psycho-rhetorical analysis of national identity negotiation.

156 Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 313. Also see Žižek, Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? (especially 84).

157 Burke, Attitudes toward History 43.

void by telling compelling narratives about the national self and the national other. When the
national subject understands itself literally, that is, when it takes its conscious knowledge at face
value, the national subject tends to think of itself not simply in relation to but against the national
other. In tragic national fantasy/attitude the national other is perceived as the one who is guilty of
lack in the national subject and thus must be rid of, to be killed symbolically or physically. More
specifically, in tragic fantasy lack is always presented as loss.

Lacan points out that the mechanism of “mourning [explicates the process of]…the
constitution of the object in desire” in a sense that “only insofar as the object of [the subject’s]
desire has become an impossible object can it become once more the object of his desire.”¹⁵⁹ I
further propose to use the concept of mourning as a persistent attachment to the lost object to
explain the distinctiveness of national tragedy: the national other is envisioned as a perpetrator
who steals something from the national subject, thereby rendering it incomplete. Having
conceived the tragic national fantasy as mourning, I reverse Freud’s understanding of mourning
as healthy and melancholy as pathological forms of affective attachment. The way Freud
conceives of melancholy is how I theorize tragic mourning: it is “the love for the object…[that]
takes refuge in narcissistic identification, then the hate comes into operation on this substitute
object….The self-tormenting [in mourning]…is without doubt enjoyable.”¹⁶⁰ Similarly Žižek’s
version of melancholy accurately conveys my understanding of mourning as a tragic attitude of
loss: “insofar as the object-cause of desire is originally, in a constitutive way, lacking, [this
attitude] interprets…lack as a loss, as if the lacking object was once possessed and then lost.”¹⁶¹

The tragic national subject never thinks it lacks anything, while simultaneously
suspecting that its enjoyment is limited by the national other. When viewed from tragically, the

¹⁶⁰ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholy” 251.
national other is perceived as unequivocal evil, that is, inhumane, omnipotent, and ubiquitous: “Unlike the rest of us, the enemy is not caught in the toils of the vast mechanism of history, himself a victim of his past, his desires, his limitations. He is a free, active, demonic agent.”

The national other always seems to be enjoying itself better, because it has purportedly taken away what rightfully belongs to the national self. Paranoid tragedy as mourning allows the national subject to supposedly return “to something you thought you [had] but couldn’t quite account for.” It also is foundational of “the phantasmatic politics of the ‘[a]s if.’” While for Barbara Biesecker the melancholic subject in a paranoid fashion anticipates the supposedly imminent loss of a cherished object of desire, I think of such subject as the one who mourns his/her pretend loss. In my view, tragic mourning is exactly “this determined, determining, and dangerous rhetoric” that Biesecker warns about. By translating the trauma of lack as loss the tragic national subject comes to (mis)recognize itself as a united, or certain subject: mourning as an attitude of loss “obfuscat[es]…that [it] is lacking from the very beginning, that its emergence coincides with its lack.”

As a product of “the dialectic of jealousy,” or the paranoid jealousy of the image of the other, and the overwhelming suspicion of the Other’s desire, articulated in the ultimate question to the Other – “Che vuoi?,” tragic mourning is thoroughly conspiratorial. As a comparatively fixed narrative, conspiracy arranges separate and ambiguous events and their participants in a

---

162 Hofstadter 32.
163 For an application of the Lacanian dialectic of enjoyment, see McGowan.
164 Marcus 17.
165 Biesecker, “No Time for Mourning” 156.
166 Ibid. Both Žižek and Biesecker rely on Freud’s opposition between pathological melancholy and healthy mourning, as well as Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of melancholy. Agamben, Stanzas, especially chapters 3-5.
167 Here I reconsider Žižek’s views on melancholy as an “unconditional fixation on the lost object, in a way possesses it in its very loss.” Unlike Žižek, I associate an attitude of lack with melancholy and an attitude of loss with mourning. Žižek, “Melancholy and the Act” 660.
168 Lacan, Seminar, Book III 39. Lacan differentiates between the (small) other and the (big) Other. The former is a spectral counterpart, or another human being whose image draws the subject’s attention; as such the other belongs to the level of the Imaginary. The latter must be understood in the context of the affective dimension of the Symbolic as a fellow speaking being, whose desire both intrigues and frustrates the subject.
single narrative – exaggerated, “overheated, oversuspicious, overaggressive, grandiose, and apocalyptic in expression.”169 In such a narrative the national subject suffers cruel persecutions for “[its] political passions [that] are unselfish and patriotic”; conspiratorial discourse “goes far to intensify [its] feeling of righteousness and [its] moral indignation.”170

What Richard Hofstadter calls the paranoid style is truly pervasive: “it represents an old and recurrent mode of expression in our life which has frequently been linked with movements of suspicious discontent and whose content remains much the same even when it is adopted by men of distinctly different purposes.”171 As scholars of conspiracy theories and conspiracy rhetoric point out, the paranoid style has become a staple of mainstream sociopolitical discourse notwithstanding its location.172 With regard to Russian political culture, George E. Marcus notes that “[c]onspiracy discourse has long been a popular gambit in Russian politics, and between the folklore for all things Decembrist, Masonic, Bolshevik, and Stalinist, it would seem at times that Russia invented the genre.”173 Indeed, there have always been those (e.g., immigrants from the North Caucasus or capitalists in the U.S.) who, in the eyes of the Russians, have attempted to appropriate what the Russians have always had, be that economic well-being - one of the common sentiments among the Russians is that illegal labor immigrants earn more than local

---

169 As Richard Hofstader notes in “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” an apocalyptic outlook and a conspiracy theory are similarly based on the idea of the dramatic confrontation of the forces of good and evil. While an apocalyptic myth and a conspiracy theory are both used to address the problem of evil rhetorically, as Stephen O’Leary in Arguing the Apocalypse notes, conspiracy points to the locus of evil (who and where the enemy is), while apocalypse emphasizes the temporal aspect of the standoff between good and evil (when and how the enemy is to be defeated). For more on conspiracy theories/arguments, see Fenster; McGowan; Marcus; Melley; Daniel Pipes; Singh; Young and Launer, “Evaluative Criteria for Conspiracy Arguments”; Young and Launer, Flights of Fancy; Zarefsky, “Conspiracy Arguments”; Zarefsky, Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery.

170 Hofstadter 4.

171 Hofstadter 6.

172 See Goodnight and Poulakos, Young and Launer (“Evaluative Criteria for Conspiracy Arguments”), and Zarefsky (“Conspiracy Arguments”) note that the paranoid style is part of the character of mainstream American political discourse. McGowan also points out that paranoia is an aspect of consumer culture, or what he calls “the society of enjoyment.” “paranoia results from constant confrontations with the enjoying other and the belief that this other is enjoying in our stead.” McGowan 113.

173 Marcus 243.
Russians or great power status. Throughout years many Russians have preferred to think about themselves as a powerful, intellectually and spiritually superior nation.

Although Hofstadter conceives of the paranoid style as “political pathology,” tragic paranoia, however, is not a “pathologized ailment” akin to psychosis. As I mentioned briefly above and promised to explicate further in Chapter Four, to be qualified as psychotic the subject must experience a radical break between the three registers of the psychic experience: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. In psychosis the Symbolic halts its function, and the Imaginary remains the psychotic’s only, albeit radically inadequate and unstable, means to structure his/her reality. The national subject may exhibit paranoid behavior, but it does not possess the structure of the psychotic. Tragic mourning as often paranoid national fantasy/attitude must not be diagnosed as pathological abnormality: after all, as Lacan emphasizes, paranoiac tendency as “the behavior of everyone” is the remnant of “the paranoiac structure of the ego,” and also incited by the fact that the subject’s desire is the desire of the Other. Instead, the paranoid style of national tragedy is ethically problematic: “[what] underlies [hateful] remarks [is] not madness, but [an]...ideology.” In this case, the tragic national subject should accept responsibility for its attempted literality, or its desire to equal its mark, “[to be] a pure sign, that is to say, obscene.”

---

174 Hofstadter 6; Melley 13. On conspiracy discourse as a political rather than pathological category, see Melley; Prooijen and Lange.
175 Lacan, Écrits 448.
177 Žižek, “Mel Gibson at the Serbsky Institute,” n.p.
178 Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 180. Hatred is often unfairly reduced to a medical problem, as it was in the case with Mel Gibson’s anti-Semitic remarks, made supposedly due to the influence of alcohol: “what Gibson needs is not therapy...but the acceptance of his responsibility for his remarks - concretely, what he has to do is to ask himself in what way his outburst is linked to his version of Catholicism, and functions as its obscene underside.” Žižek, “Mel Gibson at the Serbsky Institute” n.p.
The obscene lure of tragic paranoia emerges from retroactively “stringing together the anomalies of a troubling situation into a coherent narrative.” In fact, paranoid stories and conspiratorial narratives as examples of tragic fantasy are excessively coherent, which, however, should not be confused with their logical validity:

[the paranoid mentality] is nothing if not coherent – in fact, [it] is far more coherent than the real world, since it leaves no room for mistakes, failures, or ambiguities. It is, if not wholly rational, at least intensely rationalistic; it believes that it is up against an enemy who is as infallibly rational as he is totally evil, and it seeks to match his imputed total competence with its own leaving nothing unexplained and comprehending all of reality in on overreaching, consistent theory.

By carefully collecting details, putting forward defensible assumptions, but then leaping to staggering and baseless conclusions to compose a seemingly compelling narrative about the national other as “a perfect model of malice, a kind of amoral superman[,] sinister, ubiquitous, powerful, cruel, sensual, luxury-loving,” the national subject takes the easiest way out of “the least stupidity,…sublime stupidity” of the human condition. The latter is what comic fantasy aspires to, while tragic fantasy protects the national subject from the knowledge that “the signifier [that] is stupid,” or the very negativity of subjectivity. By masking its originary indeterminacy at the expense of the national other, the national subject unwittingly masks the sublime stupidity of its savoir only to give in to the happy stupidity of its méconnaissance.

179 Young and Launer, “Evaluative Criteria for Conspiracy Arguments” 3. Lacan referred to the retroactive function of the Symbolic as “deferred action” (après-coup). It is an idea that the meaning of a statement “[requires] the last word…to be sealed [se boucler].” Lacan, Écrits, 711. For more on the idea of the retroactive constitution of the national enemy, see Žižek, For They Know Not What They Do, especially 92, 203-204.
180 Hofstadter 36-37.
As I demonstrate, for example, in the analysis of the national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists in Chapter Four, the issue to (ir)rationality is prominently featured in their tragic narrative. The whole psycho-rhetorical narrative of Russian neo-fascists is permeated with the theme of the grotesque contradiction. Besides, Russian neo-fascists also claim to defend both the supposed rationality of the neo-fascist argument and the purported power of their ideological views, which are meant to invoke the strongest emotional reaction, rather than invite thoughtful consideration. Such claims apparently do not preclude Russian neo-fascists from believing in a supposedly coherent national story.

“[N]ourished in the imaginative dimension,” the tragic attitude (just as any other national fantasy for that matter) does not even need to be evaluated either in terms of narrative coherence or factual fidelity.183 “[Forging] ahead into the storm-clouds...toward [the] mirage” of “this so precious completeness,” the national subject narrates a story that, even if coherent and rational, is not, contra Walter Fisher, any more ethical.184 Factual accuracy of tragic claims about crimes of the national other does not render them just from a Lacanian-Burkean point of view: “even if most of the Nazi claims about the Jews were true...their anti-Semitism would still be (and was) [problematic] - because it represses the true reason the Nazis needed anti-Semitism in order to sustain their ideological position.”185 This truth that the tragic national subject rejects is the truth of its founding negativity.

Considering that the primal narcissism as an aggressive impulse to coincide with itself in a literal, obscene way underpins the national subject, it is fair to conclude that, as noted above, the national subject is susceptible to tragedy. A far greater restraint is required to resist “the

---

egoism of happiness” and to build oneself comically instead. While the tropological 
mechanism of subjectivation functions to translate lack into loss, it also leaves the subject with 
an opportunity to lay bare the subject’s lack.

Whereas tragedy (that subsumes Burke’s tragedy and Lacan’s comedy) is “the triumph of 
life,” comedy (that comprises Burke’s comedy and Lacan’s tragedy) is the triumph of death, 
more precisely “a triumph of being-for-death.” In contrast to tragedy, the ultimate attitude of 
“humane enlightenment,” as Burke calls comedy, translates transgressions from the category of 
mourning, or “the positivization of a void or lack,” into the category of the melancholic lack, the 
ultimate negativity. To stir away from tragic mourning, one must view mistakes made by 
onezelf or others (e.g., problems with, or “mistakes” of, labor laws to which some would 
attribute an influx of illegal immigrants in Russia) not as something that could be expelled from 
the social order or ignored, but as an uneasy reminder that the national subject is always 
imperfect or lacking. This is an attitude of comic melancholy. Following it, an influx of illegal 
immigrants, for example, must be regarded as problematic not due to the presence of immigrants, 
which runs against the law, disrupts the established order, inaugurating the feeling of loss, but 
because they are an easy target, an obvious scapegoat in a society, or, in other words, a repressed 
embodiment of the permanent identity lack.

---

186 Lacan, Écrits 663
187 Although enmeshed in constellations of signifiers particular to a certain culture, the subject is free since he is not essentially destined to take on these or those signifiers.
188 Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 314, 313. Burke, in fact, distinguishes between factional tragedy and universal tragedy. The former is what I referred to as tragic mourning: a melodramatic, exclusive, and partisan fantasy/attitude. In universal tragedy, however, “the stylistically dignified scapegoat represents everyman,” who “takes upon himself the guilt of all, and his punishment is mankind’s chastening.” Defined as such, universal tragedy emphasizes categorical guilt qua lack, rather than specific guilt or crime ascribed to the national other retroactively. Burke’s universal tragedy shares with comedy an attitude of sincere humility. Burke, Attitudes toward History, 188.
189 Burke, Attitudes toward History 41; Žižek, “Melancholy and the Act” 660.
According to Burke, comedy is inherently humane and self-reflective, as it reinvents the evil villain as the mistaken fool and reminds us that being mistaken is a necessary human condition. Despite Burke’s disclaimer that the comic is not a passive or ambivalent attitude, for quite a few scholars comedy is radically relative, uncertain and indifferent, and thus morally suspect.\(^{190}\) When the nation constitutes the national other and the national self comically, treating everybody as equals, in their humane blindness comedy supposedly leads to “the paralysis of indecision or self-doubt,” “[disarms] the self when confronting genuine threat and wrongdoing,” or, as Žižek puts it, results in a decaffeinated fantasy with “the Other deprived of its Otherness.”\(^{191}\)

To deal with the supposed blind spot of comic ethics, Celeste Condit, Herbert Simons, Gregory Desilet and Edward Appel stress the need for Burke’s theory of the comic to become an adequate tool for ideological rhetorical criticism, when one is able to express his/her warrantable outrage. Condit introduces a tragicomic attitude, which “transcends Burke’s preference for the comedic, by a adopting a realistic attitude, rather than a farcical or merely ironic one.”\(^{192}\) In her attempts to solve the problem of the alleged passivity of the comic, Condit reads the comic as humorous against the explicit distinction drawn by Burke between high comedy and humor: the former takes “the gravity of life” seriously, while the latter is often childish and happy in its stupidity.\(^{193}\)

Similarly to Condit, Desilet and Appel suggest one should “adopt rhetorically tragic structurings of conflict [with its protagonist and antagonist]...while nevertheless [maintaining] an

\(^{190}\) For more on the problem of the radical relativity of the comic, see Bonnstetter; Brummett; Cheney; Desilet and Appel; Henderson; Lentricchia; Simons; Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (especially 11); Zupančič, “Ethics and Tragedy and Lacan.”

\(^{191}\) Desilet and Appel 345; Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* 11.

\(^{192}\) Condit 354.

\(^{193}\) Burke, *Attitudes toward History*, 43. See also Gring-Pemble and Watson; Waisanen.
underlying attitude broadly consistent with the comic frame.”\textsuperscript{194} Calling for a more ideologically appropriate attitude, the scholars end up reducing their proposed tragicomic frame to an issue of argumentative practice, by differentiating between “blustering and dehumanizing name-calling” as a property of tragedy and “evidence and explanation” as a feature of the comic.\textsuperscript{195} Another attempt to improve on Burke’s concept of comic self-reflection belongs to Simons, who advised the rhetorical critic “to proceed intellectually from righteous indignation, through comedic self-examination, to warrantable outrage.”\textsuperscript{196} In other words, the scholar proposes starting with tragedy, moving through comedy until one finally reaches the level of ideology critique. This solution is somewhat akin to Desilet and Appel’s call for unbridled yet mature judgment tempered by a comic attitude, which implies an ability to both stand up for what is right and preserve the human essence of the perceived foe.

While most scholars who read Burke advertise the need for some tragedy in Burke’s comedy, Camille Lewis insists that Burke’s notion of the comic, complemented with Chantal Mouffe’s idea of the essential agonism of the political, acknowledges the very necessity of the constitutive outside and a healthy distance between the self and its adversarial other (this view is reminiscent of Desilet and Appel’s warrantable outrage).\textsuperscript{197} This agonistic approach to reality presents the rhetorical critic with, as Burke would say, a well-rounded apparatus: one does not have to ignore or silence others, but maintain a productive tension with adversaries instead.

As Burke urges us to “to be observers of [one]selves, while acting…by noting [our] own foibles,” Lacan’s ethical ideal seems to be more extreme.\textsuperscript{198} It culminates in the maxim \textit{ne pas}

\textsuperscript{194} Desilet and Appel 356.\textsuperscript{195} Desilet and Appel 357 (note 8).\textsuperscript{196} Simons, n.p. (original emphasis).\textsuperscript{197} For more on the role of the constitutive other/outside, in addition to Burke and Mouffe, see Butler; Cloud, “Foiling the Intellectuals”; Davis; Henderson, “Postmodern Burke”; Laclau; Murray; Gunn and Treat; Žižek, \textit{Enjoy Your Symptom!}.\textsuperscript{198} Burke, Attitudes toward History 171.
céder sur son désir (“do not give way on your desire”), or what Alenka Zupančič calls the “heroism of the lack.” Subsumed by the insatiable urge to enjoy the presumed fullness of the self, the national subject must not compromise its desire by entertaining any fantasy of the united national self. As Simon Critchley fairly points out, formulated as such, Lacan’s ethical maxim is “too Catharistic, too pure, too decanted, too clean, too heroic.”

Indeed, Lacan’s ethics has one τέλος (“goal”): it aims at “the purgation of the τιαθηματα, the emotions of fear [of one’s own misfortune] and pity” for the misery of a fellow human being. “[T]he bourgeois dream” of happiness, as Lacan insists, is political and unethical: the service of good or the shift of the demand for happiness onto the political stage has its consequences. The movement that the world we live in is caught up in, of wanting to establish the universal spread of the service of good as far as conceivably possible, implies an amputation, sacrifices, indeed a kind of puritanism in the relationship to desire…..

The tragic pursuit of desire runs against the good and happiness, but the end result is death (as noted above, the death of the body and/or the death of being) when we “pay the [highest] price for access to desire.” While Lacan does not spend much time elucidating it clearly, he acknowledges that the radical fidelity to lack is an ideal to aspire for, but not to reach. Life must run away from happy complicity in loss toward “the [grave] sense of life,” rather than drive the subject to his/her grave. This is why Lacan calls tragicomedy the place “where the experience

199 Zupančič, Ethics of the Real 170.
200 Critchley, Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity 229.
204 Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 313. To be precise, Lacan says “the tragic sense of life.”
of human action resides”: a politically progressive way to enjoy national fantasy/attitude is to maintain an attitude on the edge of death, falling short of it.\(^\text{205}\)

For both Lacan and Burke a truly ethical stance in life is much more than mere acceptance of the burden of earthly life, more than a belief in unspeakable desire. One must not only reveal the truth about desire, or the ultimate lack of being, but rather, without taking a cynical position, embrace an attitude of “a very old γνωθι σαυτον” (“know thyself”), or what Burke refers to as “maximum consciousness,” thus affirming the very productivity of mourning lack.\(^\text{206}\) In this particular sense Lacan’s knowledge and Burke’s consciousness are not conscious méconnaissance or unconscious savoir, but the subject’s moral philosophy or posture of humility and shame. Just like Burke, who contraposes humility to self-glorification, Lacan talks about “true humility” as welcoming of the subject’s incompleteness, as “an act in which he cannot help but become a being of flesh and… a slave to pleasure.”\(^\text{207}\) As a result of this act, Lacan adds, the subject experiences “an outlandish shame of living”; he/she is “dying of shame” for compromising his/her desire with fantasies.\(^\text{208}\) Speaking of the national subject, to accomplish this “humility” it must, first, recognize occasions when the national subject constitutes itself at the expense of the national other and, second, to assume responsibility for such an operation of national fantasy/attitude. Since national narratives are always fantasmatic (due to “desire’s

\(^\text{205}\) Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 314. Critchley accentuates that the comic is a truly ethical stance as it returns the subject to its materiality, to its laughably inauthentic, but extraordinarily ordinary life. Zupančič, however, does not readily endorse comedy as a banal, joyful, unproblematic finitude. Instead, she redefines comedy as “a finitude with a leak in it.” Zupančič, The Odd One 52.

\(^\text{206}\) Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 312; Burke, Attitudes toward History 171. To know oneself or to have maximum consciousness in this case is not to take oneself for who one is not – a certain, complete subject. Lacan’s and Burke’s ethical knowledge is a critical awareness of one’s misrecognition. While a cynic is aware of the distance between his/her name and his/her being (being-in-the-Real), he/she still resorts to a tragic action. As I explain later in the chapter by referring to the Discourse of the Hysteric in its obsessive form, such choice is still tragic.

\(^\text{207}\) Lacan, Ecrits 652.

incompatibility with speech”), the task of the critic is to evaluate as to how fully they articulate the truth about desire.209

To reiterate, the blended Lacanian-Burkean ethical system as described above leans on two pillars: tragic mourning and comic melancholy. A fantasy/attitude of loss can be viewed as a typical feature of extreme ethnic/cultural nationalist rhetoric, while a fantasy/attitude of lack can be regarded as characteristic of civic nationalist discourse. Between these two modes of enjoyment of national unity the former is the most hazardous, since it functions by (often violent) expulsion of the national other.210 As two radically opposite attitudes toward the national other and thereby the national self, tragic mourning and comic melancholy create the tragicomic continuum along which exists a whole range of particular forms of national fantasies/attitudes. In addition to tragedy and comedy, these forms include epic, elegiac, satiric, burlesque, and grotesque frames.

The epic frame, as Burke puts it, “‘advertis[es]’ courage and individual sacrifice for group advantage.”211 In its tragic variant, epic depicts the world in primitive terms – as a standoff with the national enemy, and therefore promotes “the rigors of war ([as] the basis of the [nation’s] success) by magnifying the role of warlike hero.”212 For example, such is the position of Russian neo-fascists who consider war to be necessary and even desirable. It is in war that the national subject can purportedly see itself as deific, or complete. Conversely, if “humility and self-glorification work together,” the national subject is likely to be a hero of the comic epic.213 The comic national hero possesses “the sense of one’s limitations (in comparison with the

210 For more on the distinction between ethnic/cultural and civic nationalism see Bruner, Strategies, especially 17, 83.
211 Burke, Attitudes toward History 35-36.
212 Burke, Attitudes toward History 35.
213 Burke, Attitudes toward History 36.
mighty figure of the legend)…. while his vicarious kinship with the figure gives him the distinction necessary for the needs of self-justification.” Just like Achilles, who has a vulnerable spot, as Burke stresses, so does the humble, comic hero have foibles that he/she cares to admit in a self-reflective, enlightened manner: “This sense of a flaw serves happily to promote an openess to a realistic admonition – the invitation to seek the flaw in oneself promotes in the end the attitude of resignation, which, when backed by a well-rounded symbolic structure, is nothing other than the inventory of one’s personal limits.”

Elegy is of particular importance in the Lacanian-Burkean study of national identity negotiation, since, as either a mournful or melancholic lament, that is, in a tragic or comic form, the elegiac frame demonstrates the very structure of the subject’s fantasy – the subject’s pursuit for the part of itself that is perceived as temporarily lost or recognized as permanently lacking. “[O]nce a man has perfected a technique of complaint, he is more at home with sorrow than he would be without it,” because the life of the speaking subject is the very expression of grief or sadness that the forced choice of castration imposed on the human being. When discussed in a more specific context, that is, in terms of the Imaginary, the comic plaint is galvanized by the spirit of “ironic humility” or the awareness of one’s own incomplete, or flawed, nature. In the tragic elegy the subject’s misfortune is interpreted as necessarily unfair and misplaced.

The satiric frame highlights another aspect of the affective organization of the speaking subject – desire for identity fullness, or, in Burke’s terms, the “entelechial” principle. Unlike the tragedy, tragically inspired epic and elegy, all of which pursue maximum coherence, or unity, of the national self by either expelling or conquering the foreign other, satire functions as a ridicule

---

214 Burke, Attitudes toward History 36.
215 Burke, Attitudes toward History 37.
216 Burke, Attitudes toward History 44.
217 Burke, Attitudes toward History 48.
of the very perfectionist aspirations. Satire ironically leads to the least desired results within the 
tragic worldview – the proliferation of mistakes and the amplification of flaws, thus further 
exposing the lacking, deficient nature of the human being: “[t]he satirist can set up a situation 
whereby his text can ironically advocate the very ills that are depressing us—nay more, he can ‘perfect’ his presentation by a fantastic rationale that calls for still more of the maladjustments now besetting us.”

While striving for perfection, or Utopia - an ideal, absolute, yet nonexistent place, or, in Burke’s terms, No-Place - the human being can only arrive at Utopia-in-reverse: “It is thus that satire can embody the entelechial principle. But it does so perversely, by tracking 
down possibilities or implications to the point where the result is a kind of Utopia-in-reverse.”

Depending on whether the Lacanian-Burkean ethical principle of not giving up on desire is taken 
into account, one can speak either about the sympathetic mockery or the contemptuous attack on 
others through irony and ridicule.

While tragedy banks on the perceived coherence of national narrative, satire relies on “an 
excess of consistency” as an ironic attempt at perfection. In this vein, Burke further discusses the 
burlesque and the grotesque in such terms as absurdity and incongruity. The burlesque functions 
as a funny caricature and the grotesque is a “gargoyle-thinking,” “incongruity without the 
laughter.”

To make the distinction between the burlesque and the grotesque clearer, Burke 
adds that “[t]he grotesque is not funny unless you are out of sympathy with it (whereby it serves 
as unintentional burlesque).”

As we shall see, against Burke’s admonition that one should not “select [the tragic 
burlesque] as the pièce de résistance for a steady diet,” both Russian neo-fascists and Kremlin-

---

218 Burke, On Human Nature 133.
219 Burke, On Human Nature 74.
220 Burke, On Human Nature 77; Burke, Attitudes toward History 58. It is noteworthy that laughter and humor are not indicators of an attitude of comic melancholy.
221 Burke, Attitudes toward History 58.
backed “anti-fascists” consistently gratify themselves with a heartless caricature of Russia’s supposed enemies.222 On the other hand, the comic burlesque as the ultimate perspective by incongruity, can function, for example, to counter oppressive power.223 As the comically-moving burlesque verges toward what Lacan calls la bêtise, or the stupidity of the signifier, attempts are made to render privileged signifiers unintelligible or stupid, thus allowing chains of signifiers to unpredictably unfold and mutate, which, in its turn, invites a wide range of unexpected interpretations and reactions.224 The burlesque, however, often risks being too obscure to produce the desired effect. Among such burlesque performances are the mock demonstrations that take place in Russia almost every year on May 1. Dressed in odd costumes and carrying posters with apolitical and absurd slogans, participants in these monstrations playfully challenge the absence of space for civic action in the country.

The grotesque too has a comic potential to “[suspend] the subject’s certainties” nourished in coherent tragic narratives.225 This potential, however, is not realized in the tragic grotesque of Russian neo-fascists, Putin and pro-Putin “anti-fascists,” who, only having rejected the legitimacy of nationalist aspirations in former Soviet republics, view them with “brotherly” affection. In the comic grotesque one accepts contradictions, rather than trying to resolve them. For example, in efforts to build sincerely intimate ties with neighboring countries, Russian national subjects have to acknowledge the desire of former Soviet republics for independence from Russia.

222 Burke, Attitudes toward History 54.
223 On the humourless state and carnivalesque forms of public protest, see Bruner, “Carnivalesque Protest and the Humorless State.”
224 See Lacan, Seminar, Book XX 11-13, 20-21. As Burke stresses, “[none] of these poetic categories can be isolated in its chemical purity.” Burke, Attitudes toward History, 57. They may certainly overlap, giving an impetus for new categories to appear.
2.8 The Imaginary and the Symbolic Levels of a Psycho-Rhetorical Analysis of the Nation

As Lacan’s and Burke’s ontological, epistemological and ethical considerations complement and counterbalance each other, both theories provide the rhetorical critic with tools conducive for a psycho-rhetorical reading of national fantasy/attitude. A concept of the ultimate motive people live by, or desire they follow, is a focal point of the present Lacanian-Burkean ideological criticism. Desire, or motive, is not something tangible or positive. Born in the tension between the non-discursive and the discursive, desire is neither a property of the Real nor is it purely Symbolic; it can be said to reside in the dimension of the symbolic Real. Desire rises from the real of the body, but only in the Symbolic, “only once it is formulated, named in the presence of the other, that desire, whatever it is, is recognised in the full sense of the term”; only then desire is “authentically integrated on the symbolic plane.” Formulated as such, desire presents the subject with the opportunity to live, which is the same thing as to live fantasmatically and ideologically. As the locus of desire, the subject lives in the split between unconscious and conscious knowledge and thus is constituted in a multitude of partisan social, political and cultural ways.

Since the poetic or tropological function of language provides the subject’s desire with its mechanism or structure (discussed above as the objet a), desire as an effect of the tension

---

226 Similar to libido and desire, Burke’s ultimate motive, as Barbara Biesecker stresses, does not belong to the Real, the Imaginary or the Symbolic, but appears in the gap between motion and action. Burke’s ultimate motive also parallels Lacan’s desire in the way it brings about “a sense in which the sheer exercising of the symbol-using faculty... gratifies a symbol-using animal... (and not just to the ends of ‘survival,’ but first of all because such are the ways whereby [people]...can most fully ‘be themselves’).” Burke, “Poetic Motive,” 55. See Biesecker, Addressing Postmodernity.


228 Lacan’s fantasy is a wider term than the notion of ideology. As I discuss it in Chapter Four, ideology is fantasmatic, while fantasy, as, for example, that of the pervert, is not always ideological.
between the non-discursive and the discursive cannot be manifested in language fully. Desire is always misrecognized or repressed from the conscious, from speech. Nevertheless, speech is where criticism begins: analytic experience, says Lacan, “has but one medium - the [subject’s] speech.” Conceived as such, the proposed Lacanian-Burkean analysis of nationalisms is ultimately a close textural reading of competing national narratives. As Lacan warns, however, a reading of the Imaginary, “far from representing the core of analytic experience, give us nothing of any consistency unless [images] are related to the symbolic chain that binds and orients them.” In short, ideological criticism must proceed from an analysis of imaginary appearances of the ultimate motive to an exploration of symbolic structures of desire.

Although an extensive theoretical base that Lacan builds in his seminars presents the critic with a multitude of methodological options for an ideological reading of the subject as split between conscious knowledge and the unconscious, they are not equal in analytic strength relative to certain research agendas. Considering the question of nationhood, close attention to Burke’s theory of motives allows recognizing a couple of Lacan’s concepts essential for a rigorous ideological critic of national identity negotiation: symptom and the objet a. James Jasinski, following Gerard Hauser, notes that Burke conceptualizes motive in an inconsistent manner: as a psychological concept and a linguistic notion. In the first case, motives are “synonymous with the structural way in which [the subject] puts events and values together,” which he/she is not conscious of doing. In the second instance, the linguistic concept of motive (which derivates from the psychological one) stands for people’s vocabularies as cultural

---

231 See Hauser; Jasinski.
232 Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* 20. The whole quote is as follows: “The motivation out of which he writes is synonymous with the structural way in which [the subject] puts events and values together when he writes; and however consciously he may go about such work, there is a kind of generalization about these interrelations that he could not have been conscious of; since the generalization could be made by the kind of inspection that is possible only after the completion of the work.”
principles and values which orient people in particular situations. Motive as “a vocabulary concept can be observed,” while motive as “a psychological concept...must be inferred” from the former.233

There is, however, nothing “elusive” in Burke’s theory of motives.234 Psychological and linguistic motives are the two dimensions of the ultimate motive qua desire: the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Psychological motive stands for the structure of the unconscious dynamics of desire, while linguistic motive is a context-specific manifestation of the workings of the structure of the ultimate motive in speech. Psychological motive and linguistic motive are made of the same cloth: the former cannot be located anywhere else but in language, while the latter is an effect of the former. Understood as such, Burke’s linguistic motive functions as Lacan’s symptom, while Burke’s psychological motive draws attention to the objet a.

To put the above considerations of fantasy, motives, symptom, and the objet a in methodological terms, the object of the present ideological criticism is national ideology, presented by national fantasies of Putin, Nashi, Antifa, and neo-fascists, which I approach first symptomatically and then by focusing on the position of the national subject in relation to the objet a. Since in my reading of competing national fantasies I attend to rhetorical and psychological motives, I refer to the proposed method of analysis as psycho-rhetorical. Just as psychoanalysis starts by listening to the analysand’s empty speech, or the “here and now” of the subject’s desire to coincide with an ideal image of the self, and aims to eventually inspire the analysand to speak truthfully about his/her lack, so does the proposed Lacanian-Burkean ethical critique of nationalisms begin with a symptomatic reading and searches for a moment when full speech of the national subject emerges:

233 Hauser 129.
234 Jasinski 372.
full speech...realises the truth of the subject, empty speech [is]...what he has to
do *hic et nunc* with his analyst, in which the subject loses himself in the
machinations of the system of language, in the labyrinth of referential systems
made available to him by the state of cultural affairs to which he is a more or less
interested party. Between these two extremes, a whole gamut of modes of
realisation of speech is deployed.\textsuperscript{235}

To reach this moment the critic engages in a symptomatic reading of Burke’s frames, which
momentarily “fix attitudes” of lack and loss, thus making the ultimate motive vicariously
readable within a cultural and sociopolitical context.\textsuperscript{236} One may say that, being at the joint of the
Imaginary and the Symbolic, frame permits the critic to make preliminary judgments about
national attitude as it takes various forms on a scale from most ethically animated to most
ethically exhausted.\textsuperscript{237}

### 2.8.1 The Imaginary: A Symptom as a Linguistic Motive

By zooming in on Burke’s frames I read national symptoms as “the [product] of
repression itself,” that is, manifestations of the repressed and thus unconscious desire to cover
lack.\textsuperscript{238} An interpretation of symptoms as “imaginary impregnations (*Prägung*) in the
partializations of the symbolic alternative” shows how exactly each national subject visualizes its

\textsuperscript{235} Lacan, Seminar, Book I 50.

\textsuperscript{236} Burke, Attitudes toward History 20.

\textsuperscript{237} Unlike Burke’s frame, Bormann’s fantasy, as pointed out in Chapter One, limits the critic to a reading of
empty speech.

\textsuperscript{238} Lacan, Seminar, Book I 195.
national other and the national self: as a comic hero, a tragic villain, an object of the tragic burlesque and so on.\textsuperscript{239} As such, symptoms are nothing but oblique traces of the truth of lack.

The psychoanalytic symptom differs from medical symptoms in a sense that the latter appear intermittently and can be rid of upon recovery. The psychoanalytic symptom is not a pathology, but “language from which speech must be delivered.”\textsuperscript{240} What the subject consciously knows and says about him/herself (the ego) and others (the specular other/ideal ego) is symptomatic of the ultimate truth of his/her being. In this sense, symptom, understood as “the constitutive condition” of the subject’s reality, cannot disappear completely: after all, “if this void [in the place of the objet a] becomes visible as such, reality [of the subject] disintegrates.”\textsuperscript{241}

Nevertheless, psychoanalysis involves “interpretation of meaning” of symptoms - an enterprise rather distinct in its operation and goal from “interpretation of resistances” in ego-psychology and ego-psychoanalysis: “If, then, the analyst gave the subject the solution [\textit{mot}] to his symptom, but the symptom persisted, it was because the subject resisted recognizing its meaning: analysis thus concluded that it was this resistance that must, above all, be analyzed.”\textsuperscript{242} According to Lacan, by focusing on the ego’s resistance or the question of why the subject resists resolving his/her symptom, ego-psychology and ego-psychoanalysis aims at “psychological normalization [that] implies what might be called rationalizing moralization,” and thus endorses “the bourgeois dream” of happiness.\textsuperscript{243} Burke too believes that an analysis of resistances of the ego provides the subject with just another misconception or \textit{méconnaissance} of the self: an emphasis on the ego “would tend to accuse a man of self-deceptive rationalization...,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{lacan1966b} Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 223.
\end{thebibliography}
whereas any set of [symptoms] is but part of a larger implicit or explicit rationalization regarding human purpose as a whole.”

As the upcoming analysis of the four competing national narratives reveals, national fantasies of Putin, *Nashi*, and neo-fascists tend toward the pole of tragic mourning, while *Antifa* predominantly maintains an attitude of comic melancholy. What is more peculiar, however, that notwithstanding what kind of frames – any from tragic to comic frames – each national subject adopts, it embraces Russia’s anti-fascist past as foundational of its present national self (and anti-fascism as radical opposition to exclusivity fits a comic frame).

The interplay of the narratives about the past and the present is in the heart of Homi Bhabha’s theory of the nation as the double time. Influenced by Lacan’s theory of the split subject between the Imaginary and the Symbolic (among many other theories), Bhabha models his nation as divided between the pedagogical and the performative: he talks about “the people” as the “double-writing or dissemi-nation.” On the one hand, he claims, there is the pedagogical - “the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past.” On the other hand, the performative includes “the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process.” As Bhabha explains, the pedagogical is a “discourse of irrationality,” whereas the performative is a language of “progress and modernity.” Conceived as such, the pedagogical and the performative are two distinct – roughly speaking, rational and irrational – narratives that

---

244 Burke, Permanence and Change 26.
245 Bhabha 145.
246 Bhabha 145.
247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
249 Bhabha 142.
provide the national subject with a complete idea of the national self: “the subject of cultural discourse - the agency of a people - is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contest of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative.”

Guided by Bhabha’s theory of the nation understood as a competition between the purportedly irrational, or mythical, past of the nation and the supposedly rational justification of the nation’s present actions, it is, however, hard to explain how, for example, Nashi uses a comic memory of Russia’s past to justify its tragic image of modern Russia. This is the case, in part, due to the theoretical latitude of Bhabha’s interpretation of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Bhabha’s pedagogical, which, for instance, points to memories of Russia’s past, Bhabha’s performative, which can be viewed as images of Russia’s present, as well as, more generally speaking, Bhabha’s agency of a people, exemplified in the idea of Russianness, all comprise the Imaginary.

Contra Bhabha, the pedagogical is unable to challenge the performative in its narrative authority since the former is always a product of the latter. As the pedagogical, national images of the past and the present (as well as the future) can and do only conceal their constitutive dependence on the Symbolic mechanism of affective signification. Since Bhabha’s idiosyncratic application of Lacan’s concepts of the Imaginary and the Symbolic does not prove helpful in resolving the aforementioned contradictions apparent in the national fantasies in question, I take another close look at Lacan’s Symbolic and his theory of the Four Discourses. Lacan’s discourses of the Master, the University, the Hysteric and the Analyst, I argue, allow us to see how the simultaneous appeal to the comic history and the tragic presence of the nation can be rhetorically rewarding and affectively satisfying for a national subject.

250 Bhabha 148.
2.8.2 The Symbolic: The Objet a as the Ultimate Motive and the Four Discourses

As Lacan warns, an analysis must necessarily descend to the symbolic level to reveal the truth of the subject qua lack: “A signifier has meaning only through its relation to another signifier. The truth of symptoms resides in this articulation” fueled by the objet a qua lack. A further push toward full speech by distinguishing among four discursive positions, from which the national subject performs its frames, is a must:

Look at the paradox of the analyst’s position from that moment on. It’s just at the moment when the speech of the subject is at its fullest that I, the analyst, can intervene. But I would be intervening in what? - in his discourse. Now, the more intimate the discourse is for the subject, the more I focus on this discourse. But the inverse is equally true. The emptier his discourse is, the more I too am led to catch hold of the other, that is to say, led into doing what one does all the time, in this famous analysis of the resistances, led into seeking out the beyond of his discourse - a beyond, you’ll be careful to note, which is nowhere, the beyond that the subject has to realise, but which he hasn’t, and that’s the point, realised, and which is in consequence made up of my own projection, on the level on which the subject is realising it at that moment.252

An inquiry into affective economies of Putin, Nashi, Antifa, and neo-fascists helps to see how each national subject performs the meaning of Russianness juggling various and often logically or ethically contradictory frames, one of which is necessarily a comic background of Russia’s anti-fascist past. With this task in mind, I discuss the nation not simply as a product of a

---

differential movement of signifiers, but also a question of strategic performance of national enjoyment, or discourse, in relation to the national other as another enjoying subject.

Consideration of the notion of discourse draws attention to the function of separation. Lacan claims that the subject truly becomes the subject only as he/she passes the symbolic stages of alienation from the self and separation from his/her *jouissance*.\(^{253}\) First and foremost, the subject is constituted differentially – vis-à-vis the unary signifier that marks another: “The subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers, whether he/she knows which signifier he/she is the effect of or not. That effect – the subject - is the intermediary effect between what characterizes a signifier and another signifier, namely, the fact that each of them, each of them is an element.”\(^{254}\) For Lacan, however, the subject is not simply “dialectized” or alienated from himself; it is also separated from himself.\(^{255}\) In other words, the subject renounces his/her unruly and unlimited *jouissance* (which always chases him down into the abyss of madness or death) for the sake of a safer alternative granted by the unconscious mechanism of the *objet a*.

While the concept of alienation underscores the tropological, figurative nature of subjectivity, the notion of separation emphasizes an affective element of the process of subjectivity production. As separated from his/her *jouissance*, the subject is a “dialectized [product of signification] in the relation of the desire of the Other….\(^{256}\) Understood as such, the subject is not just marked by the unary signifier in opposition to another unary signifier, but presented (by the unary signifier) as a subject within a network of signifiers that mark many other desiring subjects, each meaning being another limit to what and how the subject desires: “it

\(^{253}\) The relationship between alienation and separation is of logical rather than temporal succession.
\(^{254}\) Lacan, Seminar, Book XX 50.
\(^{255}\) Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 252.
\(^{256}\) Ibid.
is untrue to say that the signifier in the unconscious is open to all meanings. It constitutes the subject in his freedom in relation to all meanings, but this does not mean that it is not determined in it....

Precision with regard to the compound structure of the Symbolic allows focusing on separation as the locus of the properly performative strength of the Symbolic. Leaning on J. L. Austin’s concept of performative utterance, Lacan accentuates that, unlike the Imaginary, the Symbolic performs; and to perform is “to act as” authority, “to give proof.” From this point of view, the Symbolic acts on the Imaginary, while the Imaginary refers to the authority of the Symbolic. To explore how the Symbolic structures the Imaginary I start by locating psychological motive, or the objet a, in discourse, since motive is “a...reduced action, an inhibited action, an incipient action, a little model of action.” Although in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, where I analyze the linguistic and psychological motives of competing national narratives of Russian neo-fascists, Nashi, Antifa, and Putin, I will be able to offer a more substantive explication of the performative function of discourse as it manifests itself in the strategic employment of the four discourses, here I must provide a brief theoretical review of Lacan’s discourses of the Master, the University, the Hysteric, and the Analyst.

257 Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 252, note 1. To understand the methodological utility of the tools employed in the analysis (symptom and frame, the objet a and discourse), one may think of a psychoanalytically driven rhetorical criticism in the following manner. First, there is an analysis of the ego, or an interpretation of symptoms as resistances, that Lacan urges against. We may conceive of it as a study of a (social) symptom in isolation. In this case the critic examines the (socio-political) content and context that supposedly give rise to the symptom in order to illuminate why this concrete symptom persists and how to dissolve it. Alternatively, rhetorical (or rather psycho-rhetorical) criticism can begin with an interpretation of symptoms as oblique manifestations of desire. By analyzing a symptom against another symptom in the context of the originary lack of the subject, the critic is capable of making judgments about the subject’s ethical choices. Frames explicate a variety of choices the subject has along the tragicomic continuum. Moreover, the critic may need to move past a strictly formal, structuralist approach to the productive force of the Symbolic and attend to the affective component of subjectivity production. This is precisely the direction I follow, when I switch attention from reading symptom to exploring the work of the objet a in separation.

The Four Discourses are four alternative strategies for “man’s life in political communities.”260 Each discourse places the national subject in a specific position toward its objet a, or the place of lack from which desire for certainty emerges. Said differently, the national subject negotiates its meaning (e.g., Russianness) not only by calling the national other an enemy or by identifying with the national other (or both, as it is explicated by the satiric frame), but also by appealing to the national other as the Other that desires:

when [the fomenting ego is] reflected in the mirror, it not only gives us a’, the standard of exchange, the currency with which the other’s desire enters the circuit of the ideal ego’s transitivisms. It is also restored to the field of the Other, serving the function of desire’s exponent in the Other….In order for the subject to accede to this point beyond the reduction of the ideals of the person, it is as desire’s object a, as what he was to the Other in his erection as a living being, as wanted or unwanted when he came into the world, that he is called to be reborn in order to know if he wants what he desires.261

As a glyph of arcane language, Lacan’s prose is in need of additional translating. The national subject cannot merely imagine the national other and thereby the national self as it pleases (e.g., “evil,” “fascist,” “terrorist,” “oppressor,” “hero,” “anti-fascist,” “savior”) since “the question of identification is never…a self-fulfilling prophecy.”262 Instead, the national subject speaks from a position of the Other’s desire: both in the context of the Other and as an object of the Other’s desire: “Enjoying (jouir) has the fundamental property that it is, ultimately, one person’s body

---

260 Burke, Attitudes toward History. To reiterate, frame is a content-specific iteration of national fantasy/attitude, and discourse is its structural permutation. As particular instances of national fantasy/attitude both frame and discourse can be viewed through the prism of Lacanian-Burkan tragicomedy. As noted above, particular frames comprise the pedagogical and the four Discourses exemplify the performative dimension of nationhood.


262 Bhabha 45. An interpretation of symptoms that are embedded in frames is not a description of the self-fulfilling prophesy of the Imaginary, or a reading of an empty speech; it is an analysis of full speech as it starts to spawn.
that enjoys a part of the Other’s body. But that part also enjoys - the Other likes it more or less, but it is a fact that the Other cannot remain indifferent to it.**263

For instance, *Nashi* negotiates the meaning of Russianness in terms of Western democracy and in relation to primarily the U.S., or the Other that sets those terms and that enjoys the fantasy of Western democracy, as it seems, to the fullest. By visualizing the U.S. as sympathizing with fascism (among other things), *Nashi* places supposedly anti-fascist Russia in the center of the Other’s desire as that which the West supposedly needs in order to sustain itself as democratic. Although *Nashi*, Russian neo-fascists and Putin fight for what it means to be Russian in the terms of political liberalism, *Antifa* speaks to the West in the language of economic liberalism or, more specifically, neo-liberalism. Having conceived of the U.S. as an oppressive and dividing force, *Antifa* calls for a principally new mode of enjoyment of the national self in relation to, rather than at expense of, the national other. These are extremely general and brief explications of various discursive positions that the national subject strategically occupies in relation to the national Other: *Nashi* acts as the Hysteric and *Antifa* performs the role of the Analyst. What follows is a fairly brief and simplified account of Lacan’s theory of the four discourses, which I will be able to illustrate by historic examples in Chapter Three and flesh out in the analysis in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

The Four Discourses are based on Lacan’s formula of the subject \( \frac{S_1}{S} \Rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a} \). Although the formula and its terms have been discussed above, the elements of the “quadripodes” obtain additional, although related, meanings.264 \( S_1 \) is the unary or master signifier. As a part of quadripode the master signifier stands for “the signifier function, that the essence of the master
relics upon.” This function is of the mark that names the subject, makes the subject meaningful, provided that S2 as the other signifier is in vicinity. And the other signifier is always there. The other signifier S2 stands for “the battery of signifiers,” the unconscious knowledge (savoir), the Other: “This other signifier is not alone. The stomach of the Other, the big Other, is full of them. This stomach is like some monstrous Trojan horse that provides the foundations for the fantasy of a totality-knowledge” (connaissance). In sociopolitical terms, S2 represents a social order, or a network of signifiers particular to a specific community, local or global.

As the master signifier intervenes in the network of other signifiers as a force that “comes and strikes [the Trojan horse of the Other] from without,” as Lacan poetically relates, Troy gets taken and the subject $ gets produced. The subject, however, comes out as divided, or lacking autonomy and certainty. As split between the self and the other, the subject can only momentarily experience itself as whole: sooner rather than later the subject experiences harrowing disappointment. At this moment the subject is closest to his/her lack, to the objet a as a place from which desire for unity seeks to break loose:

It was not for nothing that last year I called “surplus jouissance” this same object that I had moreover described as the one, that the entire dialectic of frustration in analysis is organized around. This means that the loss of the object is also the gap, a hole opened up to something, and we don’t know whether or not this something is the representation of the lack in jouissance, which is situated by means of the

266 Which signifier – the master signifier or the other signifier – arrives first is a matter of logical, rather than temporal, primacy: “I am talking about those signifiers that are already there[S2], whereas at the point of origin at which we place ourselves in order to establish what discourse is about,…S1 is the one to be seen as intervening. It intervenes in a signifying battery that we have no right, ever, to take as dispersed, as not already forming a network of what is called knowledge [savoir].” Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 13.
268 Ibid.
knowledge process, insofar as it appears in a completely different light as a result of being, from that point on, knowledge [tamed] by the signifier.\textsuperscript{269}

This unaccounted jouissance, this gap, this hole, this place of lack is, ironically, the most essential part of the subject as a social and political being.\textsuperscript{270} Before the subject finds him/herself an agent of either of the four discourses, he/she is first and foremost a subject of, or rather subject to, “the discourse of jouissance.”\textsuperscript{271} The four Discourses are four distinct modes of subjective enjoyment, of which the objet a is a primary element.

Notwithstanding the fact of which the quadrupedal schema (Master’s $S_1 \xrightarrow{S} \frac{a}{a}$, University’s $S_2 \xrightarrow{S} \frac{a}{a}$, Hysteric’s $\frac{a}{a} \xrightarrow{S_1 S_2}$ or Analyst’s $\frac{a}{a} \xrightarrow{S_1 S_2}$) is in question, the left top corner is occupied by the agent, the left bottom corner is a place of truth, the right top corner is taken by the other and, finally, the right bottom part is where an effect is produced. Following Lacan’s notion of extimacy, the left half of the schema can be said to be the province of the subject, whereas the right half is the domain of the Other as a relic of another desiring subject that governs the subject. Depending on the position of the objet a in schemas, in other words, the subject’s relationship with the place of lack from which will to jouissance bursts forth forcefully, “jouissance is questioned (s’interpelle), evoked, tracked, and elaborated.”\textsuperscript{272}

The discourse of the Master is a discourse of the subject $S$ who truly believes that he/she is his/her mark $S_1$, he/she is the master who arouses his/her own and everyone’s desire to be. The Master violently imposes its will on others, which is the same to say that the first signifier

\textsuperscript{269} Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 19.
\textsuperscript{270} Like the Real, a direct access to which the subject lacks, the objet a as a place of lack is almost inexplicable: “this object is not nameable. If I try to call it surplus jouissance, this is only a device of nomenclature….We know nothing about this object, except that it is the cause of desire, that is to say that strictly speaking it manifests itself as want-to-be. There is therefore no being that is thereby determined.” Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 151.
\textsuperscript{271} Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 78.
\textsuperscript{272} Lacan, Seminar, Book XX 20.
imposes itself on the Other: “a pact [between S1 and S2] always precedes violence before perpetuating it, and what I call the symbolic dominates the imaginary, allowing us to wonder whether or not murder really is the absolute Master.”

The Master aspires to be the perfect, “pure’ or ‘absolute’ person,” “Absolute Being,” something like a “‘purified’ body in heaven.”

The Master’s discourse is also a discourse of tragically literal, obscene power. There is nothing but the signifier that would authorize the command of the Master, since the authority of the Master is purely tautological: he/she is a master because he/she is the master. Following Žižek, it may be possible, at a pinch, to discuss the Master’s discourse in terms of absolute monarchy: “the ‘Sun King’ Louis XIV with his L’etat, c’est moi...is the master par excellence.”

In her treatment of the discourse of the Master, Zupančič fairly notes that this discourse involves a leap of faith, a blind belief that a Master is the Master. As she continues:

We know that in the context of new (democratic) masters, it is precisely this leap that is under the imperative of disintegrating into something linear and, above all, accountable (counting the votes, knowledge, skill, wealth), as well as being filled in with the question of merit, substituted for the chain of reasons. The modern form of the social bond is largely determined by the imperative (call it unattainable ideal) of commensurability between the (master) signifier and the subject.

---


274 Burke, Grammar of Motives 35; Burke, On Symbols and Society 270; Burke, Rhetoric of Religion 131.

275 Žižek, “Objet a” 110. It would be fair to say that the monarch performs the discursive function of the Master if the monarch is not conceived as an embodiment of God’s will. In case he is supposedly a representative of the divine, the monarch functions as knowledge of the University’s discourse.

Stated otherwise, in democracies the question of equivalence of S1 with $ is accounted for and thus justified. Such rationalization – a seemingly objective and universal warrant – of the Master’s authority, I contend, is a feature of the University’s discourse.

As monarchies started to crumble in late eighteenth-century Europe, “the classical master’s discourse” made way to “[the discourses] of the modern master,” that is, the Discourse of the University operative in republics and democracies.277 In the age of globalization, elected leaders more than ever vouch to represent the interests of their entire constituencies fairly. Regardless whether such claims are more or less genuine, the Discourse of the University is always “a discourse of the perverted master.”278 Said otherwise, the agent of the University appeals to “the [supposed] neutrality of…human knowledge,” to universal knowledge, while exercising the symbolic violence of the Master.279

Any presumption of objectivity, rationality and universality, as Lacan argues, is an effect of primal, or primary, repression: “This lack of truth about truth – necessitating as it does all the traps that metalanguage, as sham and logic, falls into – is the rightful place of Urverdrängung, that is, of primal repression which draws toward itself all the other repressions – not to mention other rhetorical effects.”280 In other words, claims to objectivity and universality cannot be ultimately sustained since meaning is a product of the differential play of signifiers, where each signifier refers back to another signifier and ultimately the movement gets interrupted by the non-reciprocity of the unary signifier. The knowledge of such an operation, or rather the

278 Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 182. Here perverted mastery is understood as contorted or deformed, rather than pathological, since the Discourse of the University is the structure of the neurotic and not the pervert.
knowledge of lack exhibited by the unary signifier as the very first, isolated and therefore nonsensical signifier, is registered in the psyche, thus shaping what comes to be the unconscious.  

Similar to the primary role of the unary signifier S1, which sets the whole linguistic operation in motion, on the level of secondary psychic processes certain privileged, or master, signifiers (also marked as S1) function as nodal points by pinning down, albeit only temporarily, the meaning of symbolic networks that they float across. As floating, or, rather, as Ernesto Laclau has it, empty signifiers, they also acquire distinct value depending on a specific discourse they get to structure. For example, as the close textual reading of dominant Russian national narratives reveals, master signifiers that today animate most contemporary Russian fantasies, the proponents of which insist on the just and objective nature of those narratives, are the nodal points of democracy and fascism. The latter, in their turn, get to have specific meanings depending on signification networks they organize.

The empty signifier, however, is neither equivocal nor ambiguous. Instead, similar to Lacan’s unary signifier, Laclau’s empty signifier is the signifier that “points…to the discursive presence of its own limits,” to lack. As Laclau notes, “there can be empty signifiers within the field of signification because any system of signification is structured around an empty place resulting from the impossibility of producing an object which, none the less, is required by the systematicity of the system.” Laclau’s notion of the empty signifier then further helps to unpack the logic of the University’s Discourse. Although in Chapter Five I discuss the mechanism of the “unstable compromise between equivalence and difference” operational in

---

281 This primal forgetting – the forgetting of something that never reaches the conscious level – is, however, instrumental for the speaking being: “To use language properly, you must know how to discount language. (That is: You must know when something is not quite what language, taken literally, states to be).” Burke, Language as Symbolic Action 461.
hegemonic constructs, such as, for instance, national identity, now it is enough to point out where the master signifier can empty itself from its signified to the point when this master signifier as a particularity can assume the role of “an incommensurable universal signification.”^{284} Put otherwise, a certain privileged signifier (S1) that functions as empty can represent the whole hegemonic field of knowledge (S2), which is often argued to be universal and objective.^{285}

From the prism of the ethics of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the fact that purportedly disinterested knowledge is the “truth” spoken by the Master is certainly problematic.\(^\text{286}\) In a way, on the most general level, one can say that the agent of the University’s Discourse is a hypocrite, who feigns to possess to a neutral, universal knowledge, while in reality this knowledge is nothing other than a product of a particular subjective interest. At the same time, it would be incorrect to argue that narratives structured like the Discourse of the University (or, for that matter, like any other Discourse) do not differ from each other in terms of their fidelity to the Lacanian-Burkean ethical ideal. The Discourse of the University, for instance, has at least four distinct ethically-driven variants: the comic discourse of liberal democracy as a narrative of universal rights and freedoms; the tragic discourse of democratic tyranny, which highlights tensions between popular sovereignty and individual liberties; the comic discourse of bureaucracy as a narrative of law that operates in and sustains an open society; and the tragic discourse of bureaucracy as a narrative of administrative law divorced from ethical

---

\(^{285}\) Laclau, \textit{On Populist Reason} 70.  
\(^{286}\) In line with Lacan’s insistence that any knowledge is fantasmatic, logic, as well as the reasonable or practical wisdom (which Aristotle, for instance defines as “a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods”), is also ethically suspect. A Lacanian inspired definition of \textit{phronesis} could be a true state of capacity to act with regard to lack. Aristotle n.pag.
considerations and the idea of the equal protection of rights and freedoms of various social, religious and political groups.

Contrary to the argument laid out by Russian neo-fascists and Nashi that the West favors the politics of the double standard by promoting their motives under the guise of appeals to universal freedom and equality, in a liberal democratic society the knowledge that partisan interests stand behind appeals to the universal is not concealed, but welcomed in order to counter the uneven concentration of power among various political interests. In this respect one cannot justifiably claim that Western liberal democracy is an inherently deceitful and immoral project. Instead, in the discourse of bureaucracy political interests and moral considerations are often considered to be irrelevant for administrative purposes, which is hypocritical, since bureaucracy largely helps the existing political regime function more efficiently and as such benefits the Master.287

In its most obscene form the discourse of bureaucracy is the rhetoric of an oppressive, often totalitarian society, a society of Michel Foucault’s “well-disciplined body,” Theodor Adorno’s “administrative reason,” Hannah Arendt’s “faceless bureaucrat of death,” as well as the Soviet “configuration of workers-peasants” mentioned by Lacan.288 These tragic discourses presuppose that the dummy as a malleable body is disciplined into and observed on its path to being: “you have only one thing to do, which is to weave yourselves into it along with those who work, that is with those who teach you, under the banner of the means of production and,

---

287 While the Discourse of the University can be considered as structurally hypocritical and the discourse of bureaucracy as a type of the University’s Discourse is also associated with a substantially hypocritical rhetoric, the agent of the Discourse of the Hysteric, both formally and in substance, can be also said to be a hypocrite too. In other words, hypocrisy, whether it is conscious or structural, is not an exclusive feature of the Discourse of the University and its forms.

288 Foucault 153; Adorno 118; Elon xiii; Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 206. Lacan’s full quote of the Soviet discourse of the University goes as follows: “The configuration of workers-peasants has nevertheless led to a form of society, in which it is precisely the university that occupies the driving seat. For what reigns in what is commonly called the Soviet Union of Socialist Republics is the university.”
consequently, of surplus value.” Generally speaking, the discourse of bureaucracy in its tragic form embraces obedience to authority, observance of rules, and the pursuit of efficiency, while simultaneously refusing critical judgments and ethical consideration.

This deliberate or spontaneous refusal, or this inability to see an issue from unexpected or incongruous angle, is what Burke describes as “[the] state of affairs whereby one’s very abilities can function as blindness,” and, following Thorstein Veblen, calls “trained incapacity.” Similarly, Burke draws on John Dewey’s concept of “occupational psychosis” and pushes both Dewey’s and Veblen’s terms, employed interchangeably, even further to apply them to the condition of the speaking subject, who, by seeing the world from a particular perspective, through “some particular nomenclature, some one terministic screen,” is bound to miss something: “A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing – a focus upon object A involves a neglect of object B.”

The fantasy of the ordinary Nazi bureaucrat, described as a fairly average person, in the sense of being “no exception within the Nazi regime,” who was “neither feeble-minded nor indoctrinated nor cynical,” in the works of Hannah Arendt and Zygmunt Bauman, which I discuss briefly in Chapter Four, has been so far the most well-known historic example of the tragic discourse of bureaucracy. As Arendt stresses, what characterizes “the modern bureaucratic mode of rationalization” is “a quite extraordinary confusion over elementary

---

290 Burke, *Permanence and Change* 7. To interpret something from a new perspective is to adopt what Burke calls “perspective by incongruity.” On “trained incapacity” and “perspective of incongruity, see Burke, *Permanence and Change*; Wais, Veblen.
291 Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* 47; Burke, *Permanence and Change* 49. As Burke notes, “Professor Dewey does not use the word ‘psychosis’ in the psychiatric sense; it applies to a pronounced character of the mind.” Burke, *Permanence and Change* 40. As Robert Wess points out, another “implication of trained incapacity is that history is open-ended, moving from orientation to orientation with no final orientation. There is no place of truth in which to rest. It’s a history without a telos, change without permanence.” Wess 68.
questions of morality.” Among the most recent examples of such bureaucratic discourse is also the inclination of Russian neo-fascists to treat any issue that involves non-ethnic Russian minorities as an administrative rather than political matter, which again I briefly discuss in Chapter Four. Less obviously tragic national narratives in contemporary Russia are too often structured as the discourse of bureaucracy. As I demonstrate in Chapter Five, Nashi and Putin emphasize the role of law and the majority’s opinion at the expense of a critical and moral judgment. More specifically, both Putin and pro-Putin “anti-fascists” advocate for a “true” kind of democracy and civil society – a regime that is arguably supported by all Russians and reflected in a set of laws that take into considerations Russia’s aspirations toward efficiency, economic and technological progress, rather than progressive political attitudes such as an unconditional respect for human rights and civil liberties.

Unlike the agent of the tragic discourse of bureaucracy, which is a voiceless and inert apparatus irreconcilable with the tenets of liberal democracy, the comic bureaucrat is one who carries out their administrative duties in order to serve as a guardian of the principle of universal equality and the one who, if a situation demands, engages in the practice of active bureaucratic resistance to the tragic encroachment of, for example, the power of a president. Russian neo-fascists, however, not only refuse to acknowledge the existence of comic forms of socio-political discourses, they are also comfortable defining the national democracy they aspire to as a regime that prioritizes the rights of the ethnic Russian majority, or “the tyranny of the [Russian]

293 Bauman 15; Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem 295.
294 Compared to what has been a tragically inspired political regime in Russia for years, examples of participatory American bureaucracy are widely known. See Eilperin, Rein and Fisher; Kamisar; Moffitt; Riley; Yates. On Russian bureaucracy, see Dresen, “Bureaucrats and Russian Transition”; Elder, “The Hell of Russian Bureaucracy”; Lincoln; Ozernoy and Samsonova; Ryavec; Sytin.
majority,” and point out that liberal democracy is nothing other, than “the worldview of [tragic] bureaucracy,” or a discourse that is divorced from any political or ethical considerations.²⁹⁵

Having been depicted as bureaucratic, Western liberal democracy is also arguably formal. Speaking of the ideological and ethical emptiness that Russian neo-fascists and Nashi wrongly attribute to the discourse of liberal democracy, one can indeed notice that the University’s Discourse, compared with the other three Discourses, displays best what Ernesto Laclau theorized as populism: the logic of the political manifested in the relationship between the particular and the universal. Taking into consideration the idea that empty master signifiers stand behind (or, rather, lie beneath, as it is demonstrated in the formula of the Discourse of the University $\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{S}$) any supposedly objective or universal system of knowledge (S2) and as such are foundational of this knowledge, it is then important to raise an objection to the claim of Russian neo-fascists and Nashi that Western liberal democracy is an abstract framework depleted of any particular ideological content and as such is adaptable to any system of values. While the discourse of liberal democracy, just like any political discourse, indeed possesses the structure of universality, which is set in motion by the empty signifier, it is not merely a placeholder. Despite Nashi’s conviction that it is possible to successfully “connect universal principles of…[liberal] democracy with Russia’s reality,” liberal democracy is an embrace of a wide variety of particular comic interests, and is incommensurable with Russia’s political scene, which is dominated by tragic demands.²⁹⁶ Neither have Russian neo-fascists and pro-Kremlin “anti-fascists” been fair to insist that the discourse of liberal democracy is also a discourse of cynical bureaucracy. Instead, I argue that it is tragic Russian national actors who do not move past bureaucratic blindness and cynical pragmatism, which structurally are not the same discourses. The discourses of liberal

²⁹⁵ Tocqueville 180; Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
²⁹⁶ “Manifesto” n.pag.
democracy and bureaucracy are structured along the lines of the University’s Discourse, but the
cynic’s fantasy is tragically inspired and organized as the discourse of the obsessive, which I
discuss below.

While the subjects of the Discourse of the Master and the Discourse of the University are
relatively satisfied with the \textit{status quo}, the hysteric and the obsessive subjects of the Discourse of
the Hysteric revel in division as “symptomatic tearing apart.”\textsuperscript{297} The Discourse of the Hysteric,
which subsumes the position of the hysteric and its dialect, the obsessive position, is a discourse
of resistance toward, protest against, and complaint of the master signifier that lacks its power to
be the true Master. Whereas the hysteric wants to be the sole object of the Other’s desire, he/she,
just like the neurotic in general, does not want the Other to experience wholeness at the
hysteric’s expense; s that is, the hysteric does not want to serve as the source of the Other’s
enjoyment.\textsuperscript{298} Therefore a peculiar dynamic between the hysteric and the Other is established:
“She wants the other to be a master,… but at the same time she doesn’t want him to know so
much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she
wants a master she can reign over. She reigns, and he does not govern.”\textsuperscript{299} Divided between the
self and the Other, or “split… between \textit{jouissance} and the henceforth mortified body,” the
hysteric then enjoys his/her power as a promise of certainty that he/she installs in the Other.\textsuperscript{300}
The Other’s desire, however, remains forever unsatisfied, just as the hysteric’s, because “there is
something else that [the hysteric] prefers to her desire; she prefers that her desire should be
unsatisfied so that the Other should hold the key to her mystery. It is the only thing that is

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{297} Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 175.
\item \textsuperscript{298} See Sharpe; Žižek, “Objet a”; As Stavrakakis argues, the Discourse of the Hysteric is the foundation of
the capitalist culture of consumption and advertising. Stavrakakis, “On the Critique of Advertising Discourse.”
\item \textsuperscript{299} Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 129.
\item \textsuperscript{300} Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 177.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
important to her and this is the reason why…she strives to reanimate this Other, to reassure him, to complete him, to restore him.”  

Whereas the hysteric desires for an unsatisfied desire by seizing an opportunity to present him/herself as an enigma, or something that the Other desires but never gets, the obsessive makes an effort to protect him/herself from ravaging *jouissance* by setting up the Other’s and thus his/her own desire as impossible: “It is in a way in the measure that the object of his desire has become an impossible object that it becomes for [the obsessive] once again the object of his desire.” Although the impossibility of *jouissance* is at the foundation of subjectivity, Lacan underscores that “[w]hat characterizes the [obsessional] neurotic in particular is that he emphasizes the confrontation with this impossibility.”

Undergoing castration, which is read by the obsessive as the forced surrender of *jouissance* to the Other, the obsessive readily accepts his/her position as the Slave and plunges into work for the sake of the Master. Similar to any other neurotic, the obsessive then becomes alienated from the product of his/her labor. What emerges as the obsessive’s idiosyncratic feature, however, is that “the subject’s recognition of his own essence in his creation, in which this labor finds its justification, eludes him no less, for he himself ‘is not in it’.” Put differently, the obsessive does not procure enjoyment for him/herself from work - from tirelessly wondering what the Master’s desire is, but rather from pretending to be loyal to the Master, from keeping up the ritualized *charade* of power, or authenticity, of the Other, to whom the obsessive “[demonstrates] his good intentions through hard work”: “‘Everything for the other’ says the

303 Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet” 36
obsessional and this indeed is what he does.”305 While the hysteric searches for the impotent Master to govern, the obsessive “need[s] to be the Other’s guarantor,” to assume the role of a witness of the Other’s supposed Mastery.306

The answer as to why “[the obsessive] devalues himself, in so far as he puts outside himself the whole game of the erotic dialectic [of the Master and the Slave], that he pretends, as someone has said, to be its organizer,” is that the obsessive neurotic is better off professing that the Other is the true Master, rather than risking to impinge on his/her own lack.307 While the obsessive refuses to openly acknowledge the Master’s lacking nature and in effect denies the ultimate impossibility of his/her own wholeness, “being in the perpetual vertigo of the destruction of the Other, [the obsessive] can never do enough to allow the other to maintain himself in existence.”308

Although the obsessive enjoys the status of the Slave - being separated from his/her jouissance by what he/she thinks to be the will of the Master, “whose death he awaits,” the obsessive, however, is terrified by the revelation of the ultimate impossibility of being: “the obsessional when all is said and done dreads nothing more than that to which he imagines he aspires, the liberty of his acts and his deeds,” obtained with the death of the Master.309 As Lacan teaches us, the subject is never free from language, which gives the subject its name, or from the intriguing question of his/her fellow human being’s desire, which keeps the subject wanting and enjoying only as much as the speaking being possibly can. It is either freedom from the question of the Other, from language, or meaningful life as the speaking, desiring subject; but it is never both. The obsessive then is rightfully terrified, since “[b]eyond the death of the master, [the

305 Lacan, Ecrits 259; Lacan, Seminar, Book VIII 175
308 Lacan, Seminar, Book VIII 175.
obsessive] really will be obliged to confront death, as every fully realised being has to, and to assume, in the Heideggerian sense, his being-for-death. To approach the ultimate impossibility of being requires the grit and ethical conviction of the subject that eagerly sees the self and the world in light of comic melancholy. Yet “the obsessional does not assume his being-for-death, he has been reprieved.” That is why the obsessive goes for tragic mourning rather than comic melancholy: he/she finds pleasure in wallowing in sorrow for a part of the self that has dissipated into nothingness, or vanished in “the hole in the real…[which] sets the signifier in motion.”

The obsessive’s fantasy is not only tragic, but also cynical. As Žižek has it, “[c]ynical distance is just one way – one of many ways – to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, we are still doing them.” Lacan notes, this action can be viewed as a quasi-religious ritual that the obsessive neurotic performs in order to secure the certainty of his/her identity. This, I argue, does not make the cynic any less of a believer, or an ideological product. The obsessive trusts that one day he/she will liberate him/herself from the master that he/she does not believe in and he/she will be able to become his/her own master, to find what he/she was supposedly deprived of. But before such day comes, he/she continues to operate in an already customary manner, because the Master, even as a fraud, remains to be the sole source of the promise of identity fullness by, ironically, taking on the function, as the obsessive fantasizes, of the usurper of the obsessive’s jouissance.

312 As Lacan further clarifies, “[t]he work of mourning is first of all performed to satisfy the disorder that is produced by the inadequacy of signifying elements to cope with the hole that has been created in existence, for it is the system of signifiers in their totality which is impeached by the least instance of mourning.” Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet” 38
313 Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology 33.
With regard to the process of Russian identity negotiation, Russians function as the obsessive in, for example, *Nashi*’s national fantasy. Traumatized by the “loss” of the authentic sense of the national self, brought about by the dissolution of the USSR and the failure of democratic reforms of the 1990s, Russians persistently aspire for what they see as their forfeited greatness, the hope of which return they discern in the figure of a strong leader. They do not really believe this Master, who, as they acknowledge routinely, is corrupted just like all politicians, but whom nevertheless they slavishly support to keep the promise of their wholeness alive. In this sense, the Russian subject is not exactly a captive of its authoritarian Master; rather, as the obsessive structure of the Russian subject’s fantasy reveals, the one who chooses, in a manipulative manner, “to injure themselves, defeat themselves, humiliate themselves, or sacrifice themselves.”

Despite masochistic and subservient impulses that animate the fantasy of the obsessive, Lacan sees a revolutionary potential in the Discourse of the Hysteric – a capacity of the Discourse to situate the subject in propitious proximity to his/her lack: “The subject’s division is without doubt nothing other than the radical ambiguity that attaches itself to the very term, ‘truth.’” Yet, it is not subversive or hystericized enough: in the end the hysteric gets engulfed by the Master’s discourse and structured knowledge of his/her own making: “the hysteric’s discourse reveals the master’s discourse’s jouissance, in the sense that in it knowledge occupies the place of jouissance.”

Whereas the hysteric places confidence in him/herself as the *objet a* - a secret and promise of fullness, the analyst identifies with the place of lack that the *objet a* stands for. Unlike the hysteric who enjoys his/her divided nature, the analyst does not obsess over his/her

---

314 Rancour-Laferriere 7.
lack. Instead, the analyst attempts to explicate his/her acts in accordance with the recognized lack so to “emerge [as] another style of master signifier” - produce less exclusive and oppressive.\textsuperscript{317} Although symptomatic reading permits to read beyond appearances, or what the subject says about the other and the self, an analysis of frames may leave the critic wondering in cases when the subject employs ethically contradictory frames. An attention to the subject’s symbolic positions, or discourses, then would attune the critic to “the unsaid that dwells in the holes in discourse,” thereby enabling the critic to attend to the full speech of the subject’s lack.\textsuperscript{318}

2.9 The Critical Vigor of a Lacanian-Burkean Theory of National Identity Construction

In concluding this chapter and transitioning to the next chapter, which addresses the larger historical context of Russian identity negotiation, I would like to emphasize the role of the material in the blended Lacanian-Burkean theory and how such account of the material encourages a robust ideological critique of nationalisms within specific socio-political and historical contexts. The material in its relation to the rhetorical can be understood twofold. First, both Burke and Lacan support the thesis of the materiality of discourse. To speak of rhetoric as material is the same as to argue for linguistic or rhetorical realism, which Robert Lawrence Heath and Robert Wess respectively employ in their conversations about Burke’s theory of motives. Following Frederic Jameson, Wess points out the paradox of Burke’s notion of the symbolic act, which “insists on the real while subscribing to the constructionist thesis” – an idea

\textsuperscript{317} Lacan, Seminar, Book XVII 176.  
\textsuperscript{318} Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 253.
that the symbolic act produces the subject and his/her reality, rather than stemming from something external to it, that is, something objective or transcendental.\footnote{Wess 109. What Wess takes to be “the real” here is not Lacan’s Real of unadulterated nature. See also Jameson, \textit{The Political Unconscious}.}

Such an understanding of the symbolic act disregards the material role of the Real as the non-discursive. In addition to acknowledging that human reality is discursively mediated and effectual, both Lacan and Burke stress the momentous role of the Real in human life. Responding to the irresistible lure of certainty (an epitome of which the Real is, since the Real “is always and every case in its place”) with insecurity, the subject thereby carves out a space for himself.\footnote{Lacan, \textit{Ecrits} 17.} In this space, or in the discourse of \textit{jouissance}, the subject as true/intersubjective, knowing/speaking and (un)ethical begins.\footnote{The true subject is the subject that passes both the mirror and Oedipal phases successfully.} An account of the originating tension between the non-discursive and the discursive thus permits a psychoanalytically inflected rhetorical theory and criticism of ideology to avoid the traps of idealism and moral relativism.

An emphasis on both the non-discursive and the discursive, however, does not suffice, according to Dews, to recover Lacan’s psychoanalysis from “a historical and political vacuum.”\footnote{Dews 108.} Similarly M. Lane Bruner questions the utility of Lacan’s theory (at least in its highly abstract form) for ideological criticism as an analysis of distance between the non-discursive and the discursive.\footnote{See Bruner, Repressive Regimes.} Indeed, it is not readily obvious how Lacan’s theory that refuses the subject’s access to the Real as immutable and objective is capable of accounting for social and historical conditions. I believe, however, that a focused attention on the ethical category of lack as a product of the incompatibility between the Real and language redeems Lacan’s psychoanalysis for the purposes of ideological criticism.
The conflict between nature and human reality (which, contra Dews, is foundational of Lacan’s psychoanalysis) allows the subject to act or to perform him/herself (ethically), simultaneously making this process knowable and contestable by other subjects. A consideration of the Real as the sensible and the impossible provides the critic with an opportunity to read the performed reality of a particular social subject, or a particular socio-political fantasy/attitude, through the prism of its distance to the truth of irrecoverable lack, rather than a supposed truth of each reality. Both Burke and Lacan refuse that a metalanguage or “a genuinely neutral vocabulary” can be spoken, or that we can speak of situations in a way that is truly objective.\textsuperscript{324} An analysis of society or history from this point of view is an analysis of competing reality definitions, or, in Wess’ words, “an agonistic process in which cultural orthodoxies displace one another,” with regard to the fixed material (and impenetrable) wall of the Real.\textsuperscript{325} Neither Burke nor Lacan deny material facts of, for instance, a violent revolt or death, but they underscore that those facts exist in human reality burdened with subjective meaning.\textsuperscript{326} In human reality facts are always \textit{acted} upon:

in mediating between the social realm [or the Imaginary] and the realm of non-verbal nature [or the Real], words communicate to things the spirit that the society imposes on the words which have come to be the ‘names’ for them. The things are in effect the visible tangible material embodiments of the spirit that infuses them through the medium of words. The things of nature…become a vast pageantry of

\textsuperscript{325} Wess 84.
\textsuperscript{326} In note 72 I briefly discussed the question of materiality of death. On materiality of historical events see Lacan, \textit{Écrits} 216-217. All those material facts that are not incepted into human reality still exist as raw elements of the Real.
social-verbal masques and costumes and guild-like mysteries, not just a world of sheer natural objects, but a parade of spirits.\textsuperscript{327}

In this respect, a study of a supposedly factual context without addressing its actual value is a reading of a conscious, imaginary dimension of fantasy/attitude under the pretense of having an access to metalanguage. Such study is ineffectual and possibly dangerous since it passes an (ethical) act off as a fact.

Rather than lulling the subject into a dream of happiness qua certainty by the “mere talk” of the Imaginary, a blended Lacanian-Burkean theory incites in the subject an uncompromising human capacity to act ethically, that is, with regard to lack and with no regard for one’s own good or the good of the Other: “the access to desire necessitates crossing not only all fear but all pity, because the voice of the hero trembles before nothing, and especially not before the good of the other.”\textsuperscript{328} An awareness of lack perpetuated by the ethical stance of comic melancholy is, perhaps, the only possible meta-knowledge (as knowledge about the impossibility of knowledge or certainty in the uncertain). Without being dogmatic or, on the contrary, too permissive, a Lacanian-Burkean ethics leaves it to the national subject to decide how exactly one performs itself tragicomically – located between the polar opposites of tragic mourning and comic melancholy.

Ideological rhetorical criticism conducted within the Burkean-Lacanian theoretical framework attempts to explicate how the subject attempts to overcome the limit of the unspeakable in pursuit of certainty.\textsuperscript{329} In this respect the present study could be said to be an extension of Bruner’s limit work. While Bruner’s limit work is an analysis of particular discursive limits, that is, what cannot be said in a specific socio-political and cultural context,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{327} Burke, “What Are the Signs of What?” 6-7.
\item \textsuperscript{328} Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 323.
\item \textsuperscript{329} The subject never succeeds; therefore, the process of identity construction is always a failed attempt.
\end{itemize}
limit work that is driven by the blended Burkean-Lacanian theory attends to the limit imposed on the discursive by the Real, or what cannot be said as such. Although pointing out specific discursive limits and the general limit to the discursive respectively, Bruner’s limit work and a psychoanalytically inflected rhetorical criticism of ideology similarly focus attention on how particular visions of reality sustain and/or “undermine the fragile coherence [and thus certainty] of preferred [imaginary] characterizations.”

Understood against the background of the truth of the Real, national identity is a process of testing the limit imposed by the Real by acting in response to specific events and real people. Said otherwise, the national subject finds itself in a fantasmatically negotiated space between the traumas of the Real as the impossible and the Real as the sensible. Mindful of continuous and extensive analytic accretions, which molded Lacan’s psychoanalysis and Burke’s theory of human motives into labyrinthine networks of ontological, epistemological and ethical concepts and principles, a Lacanian-Burkean theory of national ideology, I argue, presents the critic with the means to carry out a politically responsive, ethically viable, and suggestively liberating analysis of national identity negotiation.


3.1 The Rewriting of History as an Ethical Enterprise

To think of the national subject as a product of discursive negotiation within the limits of the Real as the sensible and the Real as the impossible may help resist the charge that a Lacanian-Burkean theory is out of touch with the material, but still may not be enough to counter claims that Lacan’s psychoanalysis is socially indifferent and completely ahistorical. Luce Irigaray, for example, is adamant in her argument that Lacan’s theory has nothing to contribute to cultural studies, as “[i]ts theory and practice rest upon historical nothingness.”¹ More specifically, she argues that Lacan’s psychoanalysis presents a complete, rigid system of knowledge, that is, “psychoanalytic ‘science’,” where each particular case is merely an illustration of a universal law, rather than a means to uncover something new about the analyzed phenomenon.² Indeed, if a critic interested in national identity negotiation asks a question of why a specific national subject invests affectively in a specific mode of identification, the most general answer to that question is that the national subject attempts to maximize its enjoyment. Similarly critical of psychoanalysis, Judith Butler doubts the ability of Lacanian psychoanalysis to “respond to the pressure to theorize the historical specificity of trauma, to provide texture for the specific exclusions, annihilations, and unthinkable losses that structure the social phenomena” like Nazism, Stalinism etcetera.³ According to Butler, the problem of an “over-rapid universalization” characteristic of Lacanian theory consists in the fact that psychoanalysis

¹ Irigaray 48.
² Irigaray 83.
³ Butler, Bodies That Matter 202.
does not differentiate among various traumas which arguably prompt distinct, historically embedded social formations.⁴

In return, quite a few of Lacanian scholars responded vocally to the accusations made against Lacan’s psychoanalysis. In *History after Lacan*, Teresa Brennan proposes to look at the human psyche as changing over time. She tells “the story of a social psychosis” by examining “an ego’s era.”⁵ The age of the Imaginary that arguably begins in the seventeenth century, according to Brennan, obliterates historical consciousness, or a critical understanding of society. Although Dylan Evans disassociates himself from Brennan’s historical account of the psyche, he too discusses the ego as a modern phenomenon, which, according to Evans, dates back to the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁶ He defends the historical sensitivity of Lacan’s psychoanalysis by discussing the Oedipus complex as a psychic structure relative to a certain social and historical context. Although laudable, these solutions to the alleged lacuna in Lacan’s theory may not suffice in properly defending the place of the historical in psychoanalysis.⁷

In the book *Read My Desire*, Copjec approaches the debate on the presumed (a)historicity of Lacan’s work from a more successful angle. She does not search for traces of historical value in separate psychoanalytic concepts, but maintains that the concept of the “objectively indeterminate” subject paradoxically keeps Lacan’s theory open for textually palpable social and

---

⁴ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* 50. Butler comments on Žižek’s theorization of the traumatic kernel of the Real in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, as well as his discussion of both the dangers of over-rapid universalization and over-rapid historicization. According to Žižek, the extremes of over-rapid universalization and over-rapid historicization are blind to the importance of the socio-historical and the universal respectively.


⁶ See Evans, “Historicism and Lacanian theory.”

⁷ It is worth mentioning that Brennan’s and Evans’ accounts of the historical in Lacan’s theory are quite problematic. Brennan explicates many of Lacan’s concepts in a peculiar way. For example, Brennan never cites Lacan when she mentions the idea of the ego’s era; also she draws on Max Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* among others, rather than Lacan’s body of works when she speaks of the degeneration of historical consciousness. Evans in his turn makes problematic connections between Lacan’s claims and relies on anecdotal evidence from one of Lacan’s earliest works. See Lacan, “Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu.”
historical specificity. \(^8\) I argue that an emphasis on Lacan’s ethics allows distancing Lacan’s psychoanalysis from the ahistorical prejudice even further. An ethically inflected Lacanian-Burkean ideological criticism of national identity negotiation invites the critic to ask how, more specifically, judging on a scale from comic melancholy to tragic mourning, national subjects enjoy their identities, and why some modes of enjoyment are more appealing than others in light of their socio-political consequences.

To answer these questions, the critic does not turn, as Butler suggests, to an analysis of the determinate - the realm of the Real (and traumas are reminders of the encounter with the Real) - but to an indeterminate dimension opened up by the traumatic tension between the non-discursive and the discursive, which allows conceiving of a Lacanian-Burkean criticism as mindful of social and historical particularities. \(^9\) Although it is fair to say that the national subject is produced in its defensive and thus fantasmatic reaction to traumas inflicted in the process of the subject’s encounter with the Real (the reminder of which is the real lack and the second lack), the emphasis in Lacan’s psychoanalysis is not placed on trauma: “For to say of psychoanalysis and of history that, qua sciences, they are both sciences of the particular, does not mean that the facts they deal with are purely accidental or even factitious, or that their ultimate value comes down to the brute aspect of trauma.” \(^10\) Instead, the key is to pay special attention to the ethically driven choices of a fantasmatic response to the traumatic effect of the Real. To study the national subject then is to learn the history of its faltering between the poles of tragic mourning and comic melancholy.

---

\(^8\) Copjec, \textit{Read My Desire} 147.

\(^9\) Trauma signals the subject’s collision with the Real: “The function of the \textit{tuché}, of the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma.” Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book XI} 55.

As I briefly mentioned above, the history of the national subject is an ethically significant symbolic action, rather than an unfolding of the supposedly objective account of past events. While Lacan does not deny the Reality of historic events, the history of the national subject “is less a matter of remembering than of rewriting history.”\textsuperscript{11} First, a real fact of something that occurred becomes a historical event when the former gets marked by a signifier. Further, for a real fact to become meaningful for the subject the primary function of historicization must be necessarily complemented by the secondary historicization: “The signifier is…primitively given, but it remains nothing as long as the subject doesn’t cause it to enter into his history.”\textsuperscript{12} Thus national history is not a factual account of a remembered past, but a partisan account of factual events - both as they have been directly experienced and rewritten by the national subject - that are perceptible and significant enough to become a part of the national fantasy/attitude: “the history presents itself as something memorable and memorized in the Freudian sense, namely, something that is registered in the signifying chain and dependent on its existence.”\textsuperscript{13} To study national history is then to study how national fantasies shift, rather than evolve over time.

Clearly, Lacan’s psychoanalysis is at odds with a study of “the general march of history.”\textsuperscript{14} The subject’s history is the “futural past.”\textsuperscript{15} Lacan insists that “what is realized in [the subject’s] history is neither the past definite as what was...nor even the perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming.”\textsuperscript{16} An emphasis on the future dimension of the subject’s history stems from the idea that subjectivization never results in a permanent, fixed idea of the self (thus the self does not

\textsuperscript{11} Lacan, Seminar, Book I 14.
\textsuperscript{12} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 156.
\textsuperscript{13} Lacan, Seminar, Book VII 212.
\textsuperscript{14} Lacan, Écrits 216.
\textsuperscript{15} Silverman, World Spectators 59-67.
\textsuperscript{16} Lacan, Écrits 247.
correspond to the grammatical past or perfect tense or, much less, to the noun). The subject is then an anticipation of becoming the whole, ideal self and his/her history is the history of the affective economy behind this anticipation. In other words, meaning is being constantly rewritten in the affectively driven movement of signifiers. Every time the national subject reflects on its past, it historicizes its present in relation to the future, it enacts a certain vision of the past as an attempt to secure a sought-after ideal, or, complete idea of the national self. Knowledge about the past is not recollected, but reconstituted: signifiers that mark the past experience of the nation are rearranged in light of its present attempts at certainty. For example, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, the signifiers of “war,” “victory,” “freedom,” “fascism,” and so on are endowed with various meanings by contemporary national subjects, which make up for distinct and at times ethically conflicting national historical narratives and, more broadly speaking, national fantasies.

To reiterate, the history of the national subject is not a dominant narrative about past events, which presents history as a coherent and often epic story of the nation, and as such is comparable to what Nietzsche called monumental history: “Monumental history is the cloak under which [citizens’] hatred of present power and greatness masquerades as an extreme admiration of the past.” A monumental story of the national past is nothing more than a petrified national image or misrecognition (méconnaissance) of the national self as complete. The national history is neither to be found in the supposedly objective account of the national subject’s traumatic experience of the Real, which could be said to roughly parallel Nietzsche’s antiquarian history: the latter “assigns to the things of the past no difference in value and

17 Nietzsche, The Use and Abuse of History 17. In Ian Johnstone’s translation, “cloak” is “theatrical costume”: “Monumental history is the theatrical costume…[of] a fulfilling admiration for the strong and the great of past times.” Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” n. pag. Indeed, if viewed from a Lacanian point of view, any monumental history is first of all a (theatrical) performance of a narrative that looks like a supposedly immutable, true story of past events.
proportion which would distinguish things from each other fairly.””

To chart an antiquarian account of the national subject’s history is a misguided or cynical enterprise, since “[t]o articulate what is past does not mean to recognize ‘how it really was.’ It means to take control of a memory.”

Both monumental and antiquarian histories are told by appealing to certainty, which illustrates a possible uncritical, tragic impulse in the mechanism of national identity construction, or, to say otherwise, national history making. While monumental history as a hegemonic narrative of the victor can be said to correspond to the discourse of the Master, while an antiquarian, or purportedly objective, account of historical events is the discourse of the University, Nietzsche’s third method for history – critical history – has the form of Lacan’s discourse of the Analyst. Just like the Analyst’s discourse, a critical study of the nation’s history starts by acknowledging lack in the center of national identity and continues by “tracing the master signifiers of [the subject’s] life.”

By revealing how the national subject symbolically performs its desire, an ideological, critical reading of national identity negotiation allows us to explicate the “truth” of the national subject - national savoir, rather than exposing a dominant or supposedly objective meaning of historical events: “in psychoanalytic anamnesis, what is at stake is not reality, but truth, because the effect of full speech is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the scant

---

19 Just as Lacan claims that “[t]here’s no such thing as a metalanguage,” thus renouncing a possibility to evaluate any situation from without, Hans-Georg Gadamer insists on the idea that a totally objective study of history is impossible: “historical objectivism resembles statistics, which are such excellent means of propaganda because they let the ‘facts’ speak and hence simulate an objectivity that in reality depends on the legitimacy of the questions asked…. [W]e should … recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work. When a naive faith in scientific method denies the existence of effective history, there can be an actual deformation of knowledge.” On the other hand, it is useful to study antiquarian accounts of past events from a critical perspective, unmasking the effects of power in the process of writing antiquarian history. Benjamin, “Theses on History” n.pag.; Lacan, Seminar XX 118; Gadamer, Truth and Method 312.
freedom through which the subject makes them present.” 21 This statement once again emphasizes that psycho-rhetorical criticism must treat traumas not merely as accidental elements of the Real, but also as “historical ‘turning points’” which necessitate ethical choices. 22 The latter express themselves in social and cultural particularity of national identity negotiation.

In contemporary Russia, just as in any other nation that finds certainty by seeing itself as a part of the globalized world, the process of national identity negotiation occurs within the particular symbolic limits of Western liberal democracy. The privileged, master signifier of Western democracy, which functions as a “word that concentrates around it the greatest number of threads in the mycelium that you know it is the hidden centre of gravity of the desire in question,” organizes a multitude of signifier-to-signifier connections into a hegemonic network of meanings. 23 Thus, as Putin claims, Russia “subscribes to universal democratic principles” and can boast of a purportedly “healthy and civilized” legal system. 24

Even before Russia had to accede, at least in appearance, to a relatively comic attitude promoted by the Other of Western democracy, that is, at the time when the language of international affairs was a language of brutal military force, the West already was Russia’s privileged national other, absolute Other, in conversations with which the Russians were able to feel themselves most Russian: “Absolute, that is to say that [it] is recognized but that [it] isn’t known…. It’s essentially this unknown in the otherness of the Other that characterizes the

---

21 Lacan, Écrits 213. Lacan emphasizes that the national subject must carry responsibility for those unconscious choices or strategies for living, despite the fact the subject’s freedom is limited in a sense that he/she “is manufactured by a certain number of articulations that have taken place, and falls from the signifying chain in the way that ripe fruit falls….” Lacan, My Teaching 44.
[national subject’s] relation…to the other.”

Put differently, the West has been perceived as enjoying itself as ideal or certain, but the secret of the Other’s enjoyment has always been inaccessible and thus alluring to Russia. Hence, Russian national narratives have been saturated with both fascination with and suspicion of (and even hatred for) the West’s enjoyment purportedly possible only at the expense of Russia’s aspired greatness.

As the reading of most Russian national narratives in this project reveals, Russian “democracy” presumes Russia’s right to live the life it chooses, and this choice is almost always tragic (an exception is Antifa, which sees the national self in a largely comic way). The question then is how predominantly tragic national subjects (Putin, pro-Putin Nashi and Russian neo-fascists), as well as the only comically driven national subject (Antifa), speak to the Western Other in their attempts to renegotiate Russianness. As I show in the following chapters, it is accomplished by appealing to Russia’s past, more specifically the USSR’s fight with fascism: Nashi, neo-fascists and Putin validate Russia’s unreflective, tragic aspirations for certainty (disguised under the veil of Russian “democracy”) with a purportedly democratic tradition of nationhood, the epitome of which is ascribed to the country’s anti-fascist resistance. The memory of the Soviet victory over fascism also invigorates Antifa’s negotiation of Russianness, which according to independent anti-fascists must be discussed not in terms of ethnic nationalism but class struggle.

---

25 Lacan, Seminar, Book III 38. While preference for political freedom falls into a category of comic action, Western democracy in its current form is also closely associated with economic liberties, which most often muzzle various political expressions. On the matter of the incompatibility between political and economic liberties, see Bruner, Democracy’s Debt.

26 As I demonstrate in Chapter Four, in addition to the West, the Eastern national other, represented largely by people from the Caucasus and Central Asia, is perceived by Russian neo-fascists as another privileged Other, whose desire intrigues and frustrates. Russian neo-fascists are fascinated with the extraordinary ability of immigrants from the East to preserve their traditions and strong national spirit, even when the latter find themselves beyond their native regions. At the same time, Russian neo-fascists question whether such certitude of the national other is achieved to the disadvantage of the national self.
Considering the fact that for the competing national subjects, as it is largely the case in any attempts to negotiate national identity, the past is perceived as a reservoir of memories which have been monumental in the national subject’s attempts at certainty, attention to articulatory histories of Russianness is decisive. In other words, since Nashi, neo-fascists, Putin and Antifa make claims to Russia’s purportedly democratic tradition, it is paramount to take into consideration how the idea of Russianness in its monumental form developed over time. With this in mind I provide a brief review of major national ideas that have been shaping a sense of Russian distinctiveness for centuries. Among them are preference for autocracy, Russian Orthodoxy, military chauvinism, xenophobia and racism. I must note that this chapter does not necessarily engage in a critical history of the national subjects in question (this task is accomplished in Chapter Four and Chapter Five); rather, it considers how the dominant Russian national narrative has been repunctuated in response to significant events in Russia’s national experience. Thus I provide a discounted account of antiquarian and monumental histories of the Russian idea in order to situate contextually the upcoming critical reading of the history of the four contemporary national subjects: Nashi, neo-fascists, Putin and Antifa.

27 Although the subject can never know with all certainty what he/she is, he/she does enjoy, albeit having deceived him/herself, moments of perceived subjective completeness. At these moments, or “nodal points [noeuds],” metonymic movement of signifiers momentarily stops and meaning is metaphorically produced. Punctuation as a function of nodal points for Lacan then is meaning producing: “It is a fact, which can be plainly seen in the study of manuscripts of symbolic writings, whether the Bible or the Chinese canonical texts, that the absence of punctuation in them is a source of ambiguity. Punctuation, once inserted establishes the meaning; changing the punctuation renews or upsets it; and incorrect punctuation distorts it.” Speaking diachronically, the role of nodal punctuation is both anticipatory and retroactive: “a sentence closes its signification only with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction constituted by the other terms and, inversely, sealing their meaning by its retroactive effect.” Lacan, Écrits 223, 258, 682.

28 The review of antiquarian and monumental histories of the Russian national subject, put in Burke’s terms, is discounted, since I do not make claims to the objectivity and truthfulness of historical narratives that were dominant at one or another point of time.
3.2 The Russian Idea

Academic conversations about Russian national identity usually focus on the concept of the Russia idea (*russkaia ideia*), which is more than just a set of beliefs about Russia and the Russians, but “an interweaving of social practices, ideological interpretations of these social practices, and transformative activity with respect to these practices based partly on the ideas that they helped generate.” The very notion of the Russian idea is most commonly attributed to the famous Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky and the Russian philosopher and literary critic Vladimir Solovyov, while some scholars suggest that the Russian idea, which appeared in Dostoyevsky’s and Solovyov’s works in 1856 and in 1889 respectively, stems from the notion of the Russian view developed by the Slavophile thinker and writer Konstantin Aksakov in 1856. Aksakov defines the Russian idea as “a national point of view held by the people independently, as the only condition to reach the universal human truth.” As the analysis of the competing national narratives shows, it is precisely from the position of the universal human truth that each of the four competing national subjects conceive of the national self.

During the Soviet era, ideas of a specific Russian path of development were given up in favor of world revolution and word socialism, which changed in the mid 1920s with the introduction of the theory of socialism in one country by Stalin. While the term “Russian idea” was eliminated from the Soviet discourse, it returned with more power than ever after the break-up of the USSR. It is peculiar that post-Soviet Communists - those who in the Soviet times were dedicated to the idea of stripping Russia of its national identity - now call “[to restore] the

---

29 McDaniel 31.
30 Dushenko 158; McDaniel 24; Scanlan, *Dostoyevsky the Thinker* 198. See also Solovyov, *National Question in Russia*; Aksakov; Kostalevsky.
31 Aksakov 324.
32 See Chaurasia; Sakwa.
Russian idea in all its historical greatness and spiritual power...[in order to] reunite our dismembered historical Fatherland, cure its illnesses, mend its fractures, and heal the ulcers of national self-awareness." Nearly as profound as the primal trauma, a post-Soviet crisis of national identity is vividly enacted in this image of the defragmented national body.

Preoccupation with the Russian idea has been overwhelming in the post-Soviet official discourse: after the victorious Presidential elections in 1996 Boris Yeltsin instructed his administration to swiftly develop a national idea. In contrast to Yeltsin, former President Dmitry Medvedev, however, expressed his skepticism about the national idea being "born on request from politicians...cultivated in a tube and offered to society." Instead, for Medvedev the national idea is comprised of "the principles that are...in the air" and "consistent with the epoch we live in." At the beginning of his presidential career, Putin too felt it necessary to stress that he "[opposed] the reinstatement of any state, official ideology in Russia," expecting the public’s suspicion that the Kremlin would attempt to impose another state ideology (Yeltsin’s search for the national idea fueled such rumors in 1996). Yet more than a decade later, during his third term as President, Putin conceded that "[it] was an illusion that a new national ideology...would simply appear by itself." Putin clarified that "[p]ractice has shown that a new national idea does not simply appear, nor does it develop according to market rules. The withdrawal of the state and society does not work, and neither does the automatic copying of other countries’ experiences." By that moment the Kremlin had already been aggressively promoting the country’s national

33 For post-Soviet Communists, the Russian idea is utterly socialist and communist. See “Gennady Zyuganov on Russia-1 Channel”; Zyuganov, “Before Dawn”; Zyuganov, “Gennady Zyuganov”; Zyuganov, My Russia; “V.S.Nikitin.”
34 See “It Is Clear What Should Not Be the Russian Idea”; Nazarov; Sokolov; Zolotov.
36 Ibid.
37 Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the Millenium” n. pag.
38 “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” 2013, n. pag.
39 “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” 2013, n. pag.
ideology both at home and abroad. While the specifics of the Russian idea favored by the
Kremlin, as well as Russian neo-fascists, Nashi and Antifa, are discussed in Chapter Four and
Five, here I am concerned with Russian history as the process of incessant rewriting of the
dominant national idea in response to various traumatic, historic events.

Whereas studies of the Russian idea generally focus on the period of Russian history
beginning with the introduction of Christianity in Russia, and the assumption by Moscow of the
religious role of Constantinople, or the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century debate
between Slavophiles and Westernizes, it is necessary to address even earlier historical events that
contributed to how the Russians have seen themselves and their role in the world.\textsuperscript{40} Going back
to the prehistory of Russia, the Slavic people appeared in the European historical records in the
sixth century and were said originally to occupy the area between the Bug, the Pripiat and the
Dnieper Rivers.\textsuperscript{41} According to a major source of information about Slavic prehistory, the
twelfth century chronicles “The Story of Olden Time” (\textit{Povest vremennykh let}), or better known
in Western scholarship as “The Primary Chronicles,” various Slavic tribes carried their own
traditions, led distinct ways of life and were governed independently from each other.\textsuperscript{42} All of
them, however, lacked necessary military organization and strength to resist foreign invaders
imposing tributes on Slavic tribes: the Khazars in the south and the Scandinavian Vikings in the
north.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} See Richard Sakwa, “Nation and Nationalism in Russia”; Wanner; Sherlock; Ravetto-Biagioli; Shubin.
\textsuperscript{41} See Hosking, \textit{Russia and the Russians}. For a more detailed discussion of the proto-Slavs, see P.M.
Barford.
\textsuperscript{42} The Poliane, “the people of the field,” lived long in the middle of the Dnieper River and founded Kiev;
the Drevliane, “the people of the forest,” populated the territories to the northwest of Kiev and south of the Pripiat
River; and the Dregovichi lived along the Berezina and Pripiat Rivers. The Polochane settled along the Polota River,
Western Dvina’s tributary; the Ilmen or Novgorod Slavs lived in the vicinity of Lake Ilmen and under the guidance
of the Scandinavian Vikings (the Varangians) founded Novgorod; and there were other tribes. See Waldman and
Mason; “The Primary Chronicles”; for “Chronicles” in English, go to
When in the second half of the ninth century the tribes suffering the Scandinavian tribute had managed to “[drive] the Varangians back beyond the sea...and [had] set out to govern themselves,” internal feuds left them no choice but to turn to the Varangian Rus people for help: “Our land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us.” The Rus, who sought to control the trade route “from the Varangians to the Greeks” passing in part through the territory populated by the Slavic tribes, accepted the invitation. The Norseman Rurik - one of the three brothers who agreed to “look after” the Slavs - held the throne of Novgorod, which after his death in approximately 880 passed to one of Rurik’s relatives (most likely his brother-in-law Oleg), who was also entrusted with the guardianship of Rurik’s son Igor. In a couple of years, Oleg took over Kiev (by killing Rurik’s military commanders Askold and Dir, who ruled the city) and subsequently made it the capital of a new state - Kievan Rus (882-1240).

The coming of the Rus people to reign over the land of the Eastern Slavs and the role of the Varangians in the formation of the first Russian state became a central issue of an important scholarly debate, known as the Normanist controversy, in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries. The proponents of the “Normanist theory,” the most radical of which (primarily historians of Germanic origin) considered the Slavic tribes as “a backwater of ignorance and savagery,” attributed the role of Russian state builder to the Scandinavian Rus. While these claims were met by a wave of indignation among many Russian intellectuals, the theory, or at least its modification, was supported by Western-minded thinkers.

---

44 “The Primary Chronicles” n. pag.
45 Ibid.
46 See Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities*.
47 See Hosking, *Russia and the Russians*; Maiorova; Parmele; Martin, “The First East Slavic State”;
48 Maiorova 84, 54, 56.
Most advocates of the “Normanist” view in Russia sought to emphasize an enduring bond between the people and their ruler. The theory of summoning of a foreign ruler, depicted as the calculated submission (“amicable bargain”) of the Slavs and thus as an expression of their wisdom, served to evince the submissive nature of the Russians and their need for an autocratic state. Unsurprisingly, this perspective - presented by the nineteenth century Russian historian Mikhail Pogodin - earned enthusiastic approval from the tsarist state. Moreover, the Normanist view was used to amplify the supposedly long-established affinity between Russia with the Western world. At the same time, the fact that Russia was arguably established as a result of the “amicable bargain” distinguishes it and its purportedly peaceful and enlightened path of creation from Europe that, according to Pogodin, passed through a violent and bloody formative process.  

This interpretation was challenged by anti-Normanists, who saw their opponents’ view as an attempt to humiliate Russians and asserted instead that the East Slavic tribes should be credited for their independent contribution to the process of early state formation. While some “nativists” questioned the ethnic belonging of the Rus people, defending their Slavic roots, and thus the native origin of Russian monarchy, others used the legend to find the origins of Russia as a multi-ethnic state and thereby establish support for an “imperial” theory of Russian state-building. Already by the mid-sixteenth century Russia was a home to non-Christian and non-Slavic people. The military expansion agenda of the Russian Empire had to coexist, in an uneasy and often contradictory manner, with Orthodox and Slavic practices in Russia.

---

49 See Maiorova 157.
50 Mikhail Katkov, a nineteenth century Russian journalist, offered an “imperial” theory of Russian state-building. He claimed that the Estonians and the Latvians were naturally drawn to the Russian people from time immemorial, and together with the latter they invited the Varangians, demonstrating their subordination not only to the foreign prince but also to the Russian nation. See Maiorova 87-91.
51 Hosking, Russia and the Russians 149; Hosking, “The State and Identity Formation in Russia” 21-34.
Unlike Russian Normanists, “nativists” argued for the voluntary summoning of the Scandinavian princes by the Russian people (versus the conquest of the latter by the former): the Varangians were invited to save the Russians from internal feuds and the need to use violence.\textsuperscript{52} The original relationship between the people and the rulers was also conceived as the relationship of protection and noninterference. The rulers were not supposed to impose on “the inner fabric of national life,” or a traditional Russian institute of the village commune (\textit{obshchina} or \textit{mir}). The people in their turn were arguably disinterested in politics as a result of their “inborn revulsion at wielding power,” and thus willingly submitted their political will and freedom to the autocrat.\textsuperscript{53} This view on the state and the people also portrays the Russians as a nation strong enough to absorb a foreign dynasty.

While it is not possible to talk about the Russian nation at the time of the summoning (there were only tribes at that time), the “Normanist theory” became one of the most prominent attempts to retroactively formulate the “essence” of Russianness. Both Normanist and anti-Normanist views emphasized the least progressive elements which have comprised the Russian idea ever since: surrender to a strong ruler, apathy for political life, and the presumed prominence of the Russians and Russian culture among other ethnic groups and cultures. Besides emphasizing specific characteristics of Russianness, the Normanist controversy exemplifies, generally speaking, the very nature of the national subject – its constitutive dependence on the national other and, more specifically, the ambivalent or, speaking in Lacan’s terms, primitively paranoid relationship with the West that has been defining Russian national identity for centuries.

\textsuperscript{52} For a detailed account of the motif of suffering in Russian culture, see Rancour-Laferriere; Hosking, \textit{Russia and the Russians}; Maiorova; Billington, \textit{The Icon and the Axe}.

\textsuperscript{53} Maiorova 60.
As Tim McDaniel argues, Russian national identity was built defensively or in fear and suspicion of the West. This could be explained by the fact that, according to McDaniel, Russianness “was more ideology than ‘culture’.” Ancient Rus did not have an organized archive of knowledge, traditions and national ways of life as it was a network of culturally distinct Slavic tribes. What eventually united them was the common faith. The Russian nation then is not an outcome of an incremental ethnogenesis, however fantasmatic this process is. Instead, the Russian nation emerged as a result of a swift and calculated move guided by the tasks of “theology, state-building, and community-building.” And it is later, during the times of Russian Empire, when a fully fledged idea of the Russian nation formed on the basis of the religious and autocratic peculiarities of Russia.

Since the early days in Russia, religion and politics marched in lockstep. The very Christianization of Kievan Rus occurred as a step toward state-building. Grand Prince of Kiev Vladimir the Great (978-1015) made a conscious decision to convert Russia from paganism to Orthodox Christianity: his objective was to unite otherwise loosely affiliated fortified cities in one state (besides, adoption of Orthodox Christianity promised to establish and sustain advantageous military and trade connections with Byzantium). To give the somewhat arbitrary choice of state religion a more profound significance, Vladimir’s son Yaroslav set a process of history making in motion. Although, as mentioned above, historic memory is a retroactive effect of largely unconscious rewriting of the perceived experience of the past, in Kievan Rus monks were commissioned to give Russia a sense of historical and cultural distinctiveness. According to Geoffrey Hosking, a story of the newly established Christian people went as far back as the sons

---

54 McDaniel 28.
55 Hosking, Russia and the Russians 42.
of Noah and the apostle Andrew who arguably prophesized that “[o]n these hills the grace of God will shine forth, there will be a great city, and God will erect there many churches.”

An almost similar attempt at historicizing the spiritual origins of the nation can be observed, for example, in the rhetoric of the modern Russian state. Speaking with regard to Russia’s military involvement into the annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula in 2014 Putin emphasized that:

In addition to ethnic similarity, a common language, common elements of their material culture, a common territory, even though its borders were not marked then, and a nascent common economy and government, Christianity was a powerful spiritual unifying force that helped involve various tribes and tribal unions of the vast Eastern Slavic world in the creation of a Russian nation and Russian state. It was thanks to this spiritual unity that our forefathers for the first time and forevermore saw themselves as a united nation. All of this allows us to say that Crimea, the ancient Korsun or Chersonesus, and Sevastopol have invaluable civilizational and even sacral importance for Russia…. And this is how we will consider it from now on.57

Since the moment Russia adopted Orthodox Christianity, its religion and history have served to endow the Russians with a sense of wholeness and purpose.

Prior to the conversion it was geography, or more specifically the adverse geographic conditions of the East European plain, that precipitated thinking of the early Russians: “Harsh seasonal cycles, a few, distant rivers, and sparse patterns of rainfall and soil fertility controlled the lives of the ordinary peasant; and the ebb and flow of nomadic conquerors often seemed little

---

56 Zenkovsky 47.
more than the senseless movement of surface objects on an unchanging and unfriendly sea.” As Billington argues, the assumption of Christianity allowed the Russians looking back on the circumstances of their life with confidence and meaning, which, in its turn, explains “the extraordinary sense of history,” or “desire to see a spiritual truth in the tangible,” which was a defining feature of early Russian culture and is characteristic of modern Russian politics. As Billington adds, “Orthodox Christianity offered a particularly close identification of charismatic power with historical tradition: an unbroken succession of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles that stretched from creation and on to final judgment.” A mystic sense of Russia’s divine destiny, as a function of the very mythical objet a, has guided the process of cultural and national identity construction for centuries. Every experience and event of the Russians has been diligently monumentalized as a proof of Russia’s movement toward its preordained future.

Vladimir the Great’s choice of religion for Russia, as some argue, became one of the greatest tragedies in Russia’s history:

The goals most sought by the Russian government in the twentieth century have been material progress and power. From that perspective, the Russians would have been vastly more fortunate in 988 to have chosen the elixir of future dynamism, that is, the religion of Rome. From the perspective of the Russian Orthodox believer, the rationalism and materialism of Western liberal capitalism and the rationalism and materialism of Soviet Marxist socialism are Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and one of them is as close to Antichrist as the other.

58 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 11.
59 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 9.
60 Ibid.
61 Ragsdale 10. Also see Pipes 223.
While the West embraced ascetic-ethical types of religion (first Catholicism and later also Protestantism), Russia entrusted itself into the ascetic-mystical Christian Orthodoxy. Following Max Weber, Hugh Ragsdale explains that the “inner-worldly ascetism” of the West was conducive of rational action. Those following the ascetic-ethical model search for salvation in this life by transforming the world in accordance with religious tenets, where the world is perceived to be a creation of god and is the only medium where one can prove his/her worthiness. When the ascetic as “a rational reformer or revolutionary,” for example, achieves success or gains profit, this is perceived to be god’s reward for the ascetic’s labor.

In contrast, the “world-rejecting ascetism” of Russian Orthodoxy favors withdrawal from, or rather resistance to, the world which is supposedly full of temptation and utilitarian, mundane and thus ungodly activities. Within this view the ascetic passively waits for salvation possible in the afterlife. While the inner-worldly ascetism welcomes participation in the life of society, the world-rejecting religious paradigm presents matters of society, including civil society, as dangerous since they purportedly promote individual, selfish interests rather than the common good as the ultimate purpose of salvation. Instead, the world-rejecting attitude relies on an idea of sobornost. The term sobornost (which originates from the word sobor, or “council,” “church”) was first used by Slavophile Ivan Kireevsky and further developed by Alexei Khomiakov to indicate a supposedly authentic element of Russianness - “the choral principle in Russian life,” a religiously inspired innate harmony among Russian people.

To emphasize an important difference between society as an aggregate of individual interests and sobornost as an organic, undivided unity of people, I must point out that the West and Russia rely on two distinct dialectics of the public and the private. The West functions in line

---

62 Weber 166.
63 Ibid.
64 Semion Frank, qtq. in Billington, Russia in Search of Itself 146.
with the liberal-economistic model, while Russia is entrenched in the collective domestic view of the private as theorized by Philippe Ariès.\(^\text{65}\) According to the liberal-economistic theory of the public/private, the private is a sphere of individual interests which lead to the common good. The private realms of market economy and civil society often oppose the encroaching public – the authority of the state. If understood from a perspective of the domestic or familial model, the private is a sphere of people as an organic whole, as symphonic unity that provides “a refuge against the self-interested individualism and impersonality of civil society.”\(^\text{66}\) Conducive of individual action, the Western ascetic-ethical religious model was certainly more compatible with the intellectual spirit of Enlightenment and thus a development of an active civil society, whereas Russia’s mystic religious attitude precluded critical thought and civic engagement.

The notion of *sobornost* was introduced by the Slavophiles precisely to counter such Western values as a preference given to individual freedom supposedly at the expense of communal unity. At the same time the Slavophiles also set the Russian principle of *sobornost* against the Catholic tradition of the uniformity of the language of the Catholic Church and ecclesial authoritarianism. Being antithetical to individual interests and choices, as well as far from static servitude, *sobornost* instead is based on a Russian Orthodox understanding of the organic harmony between freedom and community: it is “the free unity of the members of the Church in their common understanding of truth and finding salvation together – a unity based upon their unanimous love for Christ and Divine righteousness.”\(^\text{67}\) While *sobornost* promotes the type of community that in a conciliatory spirit becomes a place for both freedom and obedience, most of the Russian national experience, however, has been far more propitious toward the latter. Within the Russian Orthodox tradition of the assuaging “unity in plurality” or diversity, one can

---

\(^\text{65}\) See Weintraub.
\(^\text{66}\) Weintraub 18.
\(^\text{67}\) Lossky 35.
choose freely only as long as he/she makes the only possible “right” choice, and in this action the subject is not really emancipated.68

Generally speaking, lack of freedom lies at the very foundation of the human subject: as the subject assumes his/her unary mark, he/she is precluded from enjoying his/her (mythical) unity fully. He/she is forced by the alienating function of language to choose between the freedom of ultimate enjoyment and life as a meaningful subject in the favor of the latter. Moreover, by entering language the subject becomes a part of a particular socio-political and cultural order which guides his/her attempts at certainty. As mentioned before, the absence of the fundamental freedom of jouissance, that is, the ultimate impossibility to be what one desires to be, opens up a space for ethical decisions. Sobornost as an expression of the supposedly innate Russian aspersion for freedom amounts to what Žižek calls “an empty symbolic gesture”: “freedom of choice effectively often functions as a mere formal gesture of consent to…oppression and exploitation.”69 Whether the one who extends the empty gesture truly believes in freedom to make a choice or acts cynically, such action exemplifies a tragic attitude. In other words, sobornost can be seen as a tragic national aspiration toward the illusory complementarity of individuals, united by their love of God, “carried consistently to the end and actualized in full…in the one, complete, integral truth of Divine humanity.”70

Although formulated as a debate between Normanists and nativists, the Normanist controversy presents no more than two slightly different versions of the Russian Orthodox mystic ascetic. The themes of renunciation of violence, implied obedience to and suffering inflicted by authorities, featured in the Normanist theory, have religious roots and can be traced

68 Khomiakov 139.
70 Solovyov 24. On sobornost, see also Beck 425; Knox; Moyse, Kirkland, and McDowell; Rancour-Laferriere 227-230; Wallace.
to discussions of important historical events and political figures, such as a story about Boris and Gleb. Princes Boris and Gleb, the youngest sons of Vladimir the Great, refused to defend their dynastic rights for the Kievan throne by force and were murdered presumably by their sibling Sviatopolk. Having suffered violent deaths, which imitated Christ’s willingness to bear crucifixion, Boris and Gleb were beatified as strastoterpy (“passion-bearers”).

Another historical figure associated with piety is Alexander Nevsky, who governed Novgorod during the most painful time of Kievan Rus’ history - the early years of the Tatars’ invasion. At that time Russia faced an uneasy choice: either to resist the Tatar-Mongol invasion and perish (the Tatars’ army was the strongest in the world at that time) or to humbly accept the yoke as arguably a part of God’s plan for Russia. The latter option appealed to Alexander Nevsky, who supposedly was unburdened by his personal ambitions, but concerned with the safety of his people. He surrendered himself and his state to the lordship of the Tatar-Mongols and agreed to pay a tribute to the invaders. Alexander Nevsky, as Nicolas Zernov argues, “[taught] the Russians two lessons which they were loath to learn”: to strategically submit to the rule of a stronger opponent and to obey unconditionally their own rulers. With the end of the Tatar-Mongol yoke in Russia and inspired by the following rise of the Russian Empire, the Russians erased the memory of Russia’s surrender to the invaders from the East, replacing it with an unbridled suspicion of and hatred toward everything foreign, while at the same time remaining loyal to their rulers.

A supposed virtue of pious submission to the authority of the state and the church and thereby the will of God gravely curtailed the development of Russian civil society. Obviously encouraged by the state and the church, withdrawal from matters of political significance since

71 “Passion-bearer” is the lowest holy rank in the Russian Orthodox Church. See Garrard and Garrard 118.
72 Zernov 24.
73 On the history of Russian civil society, see Evans Henry, and Sundstrom.
then have been often discussed in fatalistic terms: “Fashioned, moulded, created by our rulers and our climate, we have become a great nation only by dint of submission....Scan our chronicles from beginning to end: on each page you will find the profound effect of authority, the ceaseless action of the soil, and hardly ever that of the public will.” In renouncing their individual political freedoms and distancing themselves from politics, the Russians arguably find freedom to lead a satisfying spiritual and moral life in a familial community. This is what Daniel Rancour-Laferriere calls “a masochist’s idea of freedom” - a peculiar idea that servitude precipitates freedom. Nikolai Fedorov, a nineteenth century Russian philosopher, for instance, saw a more sophisticated and keen understanding of freedom in Russian meekness. As Pyotr Chaadaev, another Russian philosopher of the same period, adds, “in abdicating its power in favor of its masters, in yielding to its native psychical climate, the Russian nation gave evidence of profound wisdom.”

Although it may be fair to say that a tragically inflected attitude of obedience to the authority of the state has been cultivated throughout Russia’s history and presented as an idiosyncratic feature of Russian national spirit, it would be wrong to claim the Russians are psychically predisposed to volunteer resignation of their will. Contrary to Johann Gottfried von Herder’s theory of Volksgeist, national identity is not a pre-political, inborn, God-given mentality, character or soul of a people, but a product (or rather a product-in-making) of the national subject’s politically and ethically significant reactions to contingencies of its being.

74 Chaadaev 178.
75 Rancour-Laferriere 41.
76 Young 139.
77 Chaadaev 178.
78 On concepts of Herder’s Volksgeist and Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu’s general national spirit (which I discuss later) from a psychoanalytic angle, see Kristeva, Nations without Nationalism. On Herder’s Volksgeist, see Berger; Lonnie Johnson. On Montesquieu’s general national spirit, see Dunning; Hunter; Montesquieu; Sebastiani.
The above holds true even taking into account that from the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis any subject is fundamentally enslaved by language:

Regarding this slavery that inaugurates the roads to freedom…I can point here to what it hides…The struggle that gives rise to this slavery is rightly called a struggle of pure prestige, and what is at stake—life itself—is well suited to echo the danger of the generic prematurity of birth, which Hegel was unaware of, and which I have situated as the dynamic mainspring of specular capture. But death—precisely because it is dragged into the stakes—simultaneously shows what is elided by a preliminary rule as well as by the final settlement. For, in the final analysis, the loser must not perish if he is to become a slave. In other words, a pact always precedes violence [of the Master] before perpetuating it, and what I call the symbolic dominates the imaginary, allowing us to wonder whether or not murder really is the absolute master.  

Lacan employs a metaphor of the master and the slave to argue that any human being upon entering language and society submits to language, thus becoming a slave to the master signifier that gives meaning to his/her life. Only by refusing the ultimate freedom of jouissance that leads, as mentioned in Chapter Two, to the symbolic death of the subject, or annihilation of subjectivity, is the subject able to become somebody, or to mean something to somebody, and “[t]here can be no more obvious lure than this, politically or psychologically.” 80 In this newly found, albeit fleeting, certainty the subject then obtains the sought-after enjoyment. This circuitous path to jouissance is a path of both suffering and pleasure - gloom of alienation and

80 Ibid.
happiness of promised unity: “the path toward death - this is what is at issue, it’s a discourse about masochism - the path toward death is nothing other than what is called jouissance.” 81

The Russian ascetic takes the primary masochistic or alienating injunction to relinquish jouissance and submit to the law of language by the letter: he/she does not only tragically believe in the certainty of his/her being, but as the obsessional neurotic he/she makes this belief conditional on certainty or rather an appearance of certainty, or the empty gesture of his/her master. 82 Therefore, the Russian ascetic slavishly surrenders to the will of his/her autocratic ruler and this defensive operation supposedly precludes the aspired unity of the self from disintegrating into meaninglessness. Just as the obsessional believes that he/she cannot enjoy fully out of fear that it compromises the apparent certainty of his/her master and thereby his/her own certainty, the Russian ascetic refuses his/her freedom to think for him/herself and act by his/her own volition. It is peculiar that the Russian ascetic does not even need to believe that the autocratic leader is the true master; the relationship between the Russian obsessional ascetic and the master is that of the amicable bargain. 83 The master merely carries out a function of mastery, or a despotic force that is vital, as the Russian obsessional ascetic believes, for preserving the national spirit.

The role that the Other executes for the obsessive neurotic approximates considerably what Habermas dubs as the “publicity of representation.” 84 Habermas discusses the character of feudal authority by pointing out that the feudal lord does not represent his/her people and their

82 According to Lacan, the fundamental slavery and masochism is the subject’s submission to language - an operation which splits the subject between what the subject knows about himself and what he really is: “The masochistic outcome…we cannot understand it without the dimension of the symbolic. It is located at the juncture between the imaginary and the symbolic. What, in its structurating form, is generally called primary masochism is located at this juncture. That is also where one must locate what is usually called the death instinct, which is constitutive of the fundamental position of the human subject.” And “the primary alienation…[is] that by which man enters into the way of slavery.” Lacan, Seminar, Book I 172; Lacan, Seminar, Book XI 212.
83 As pointed out above, on a fundamental level, language is a pact between the subject and the other.
84 Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere 7.
interests, but is merely a tragic demonstration of his/her supposedly god-given power before the people: “[feudal publicity] imitates the kind of aura proper to the personal prestige and supernatural authority once bestowed by the kind of publicity involved in representation.”

What underlies the publicity of both the obsessive’s Other and the feudal lord is an emphasis on a mere appearance or theatricality of mastery. The obsessive ascetic’s conscious or unconscious awareness of the ultimate (importance and) impotence of the Other’s mastery, however, does not bear any comically significant implications: the Russian ascetic tragically welcomes his/her suffering to be able to reclaim the certainty of the national self.

The Russians saw every traumatic moment of their history that endangered the integrity of Russia’s territory and culture as a proof that political and intellectual freedom is antithetical to Russian national experience. That was the lesson of Kievan Rus: “No state afflicted with the geography of Russia - open frontiers and a northern European agricultural economy - could afford the luxuries of freedom and anarchy that had condemned Kiev.”

Kievan Rus was composed of city-states, or principalities, which coincided roughly with the territories originally inhabited by various Slavic tribes and now are Ukraine, Belarus and the north-western part of Russia. Each city-state, although self-governed and headed by its own prince of the Rurikid dynasty, recognized the authority of and paid tribute to the Grand Prince of Kiev. The history of Kievan Rus, as Geoffrey Hosking notes, was a tale of constant effort to build a strong

---

85 Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere 95.
86 Ragsdale 20.
87 See Vernadsky.
88 In most city-states in Kievan Rus (with the exception of Novgorod), the power of princes eventually increased and limited the authority of city governments. At the beginning of the twelfth century the Republic of Novgorod secured its independence from Kiev and established an elected office of the prince of Novgorod (selected from the Rurikid dynasty). The supreme power belonged to the city assembly (veche), while the role of the prince in Novgorod was mainly that of a mediator or magistrate. See Parmele; Milner-Gulland; Kamenskii and Griffiths.
centralized sovereign state, which was only a moderate success by the end of Vladimir I’s reign (978-1015).  

With the death of Grand Prince Yaroslav (1019-1054), who divided the lands of Kievan Rus among his sons and left his throne of Grand Prince to his eldest son Isiaslav (1054-1068, 1069-1073, 1076-1078), Old Russia plunged into a whirlpool of interprincely rivalry. Based on a rota (or ladder) system of succession, a genealogically senior Rurikid inherited the throne of Kiev, while remaining principalities were redistributed among other princes in accordance with their dynastic status. However, due to an increasing number of Rurikid and the split of the dynasty into single families, guided by interests of their own clan, this princely succession system could not accommodate claims of numerous members of the Rurik house to the throne. The violent dynastic struggle inaugurated the appanage period in the history of medieval Russia: the first Russian state transformed into a loosely connected federation of principalities or, according to some theories, dissolved into separate states. The internecine feuds weakened Kievan Rus and left it defenseless in the face of the Mongol conquest of Russia.

An execution of the politics of openness (or freedom of speech) and change - glasnost and perestroika - in the second half of the 1980s once again stimulated the break-up of the state which has been a successor to the Russian Empire. The latter in its turn came to be only by the imposition of the absolutist power that flourished in the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the Tsardom of Russia: “The irony of this situation in Russia was that it made the strength of the nation depend more and more exclusively on the strength of the state, or it weakened society

---

89 See Martin, Medieval Russia.
90 See Vernadsky; Martin, “The First East Slavic State”; Parmele; Chew; Riasanovsky, Russian Identities: A Historical Survey; Ricci; Ziegler.
91 See Martin, “The First East Slavic State”; Vernadsky; Milner-Gulland.
progressively." The odds of the Grand Duchy of Moscow surpassing or even reclaiming the former might and glory of the Kievan state seemed miserably low. However, despite political disintegration, the Mongol conquest of Russia from the middle of the thirteenth to the second half of the fifteenth century, a military threat from the Teutonic and Livonian knights, and undue “attention” from the Polish and Lithuanian territorial contenders, the idea of the Russian land united by faith and fighting against culturally distinct invaders warranted the continuity of the Russian people over the turbulent centuries of medieval Russia.

The end of the appanage period and the beginning of “the true Muscovite Russia” is commonly associated with Ivan III, also known as Ivan the Great (1462-1505), who completed the centralization of the Russian state by subordinating most major principalities of former Kievan Rus to Moscow, one of the more affluent of which was Novgorod. Later Ivan’s son, Vasili III (1505-1533), “gathered” the few remaining Russian cities. As scholars of Russia observe, “the epochal rise of Muscovy from little or nothing to the status of a powerful East European tsardom, and eventually of that of the Russian Empire and even the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics” is paradoxical.

There was nothing in the desolate northern city that could suggest Muscovy’s future greatness: while other principalities, for instance, Novgorod and Tver, could boast of their economic might and relations with the West, Moscow did not even appear in the chronicles of the middle of the twelfth century. Nonetheless a few factors - Moscow’s geographic location and subsequent economic opportunities, the organizational abilities of Moscow’s prince and the religious significance of the principality - helped to turn an initially unfavorable situation around. The location of Moscow at the crossing of important waterways contributed to its economic

---

92 Ragsdale 31.
93 See Riasanovsky, Russian Identities; Borrero.
94 Riasanovsky, Russian Identities 35.
development, which enabled the principality to pay tribute imposed by the Mongols promptly and in full. Favored by the Golden Horde, Muscovy’s grand prince Ivan Kalita, also known as Ivan the Wallet (1328-1341), secured yarlyk (a “charter of privileges” granted by the Mongol khan) and with it a commission-based responsibility to collect tribute payments from other Russian princes, as well as the right to coin money and negotiate. In addition, the transfer of the Metropolitan seat from Vladimir to Moscow in the early fourteenth century elevated the political significance of Moscow comparatively to other principalities.95

The absolutist rule of Ivan III, Grand Prince of Moscow, both helped preserve what soon would emerge as the Russian nation and permitted Muscovy to expand dramatically. Ragsdale notes that the late medieval and early modern history of Russia instilled in the Russian state and the Russian people two distinctly different value systems:

The great fault line in Russian culture opposes these two outlooks to each other in a schizoid fashion. The tradition of the Russian state has been to believe in a conventionally familiar fashion that this world was comprehensible and controllable….The tradition of the Russian people finds such an attitude to be nonsense – pride, arrogance, hubris.96

This “schizoid fissure” between belligerent interventionism on the international arena and voluntary subservience to the state, however, is no more than tenuous.97 As James Billington points out, passive kenoticism and active militarism are two sides of the same coin: “Soldiers followed images of the saints into combat, while dedicated figures at home followed the image of Christ into the battle with sin.”98 Moreover, the two seemingly contradictory outlooks, as I

---

95 See Magnus; Bury; Tomašić; Riasanovsky, Russian Identities.
96 Ragsdale 48.
97 Ibid.
98 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 66.
show below, originate from the same psychic structure that underwrites the idea of *sobornost* - coerced “freedom.”

The historical image of Alexander Nevsky exemplifies well the duality of Russian national identity: an attitude of passive suffering and active sacrifice for the sake of the nation. Nevsky has not only become an embodiment of religious devotion, self-abnegation and humility, but is also associated with one of the Russia’s greatest victories over foreign invaders. Nevsky demonstrated himself as a brave and successful military commander who defeated the crusaders from the West twice: first the Swedes on the Neva River (hence the moniker *Nevsky*), and later the Teutonic Knights at the frozen lake of Peipus (hence the event is popularly known as the Battle on the Ice). For his faith in God’s will, as well as his tactical cooperation with the Mongol-Tatars, which allowed the Russian Orthodox Church to prosper even under the yoke, Nevsky was canonized in 1547. Owing to his military victories, which were also viewed through the prism of religion, his military order – the Order of Alexander Nevsky – was established in 1725, which later during the Second World War was reinvented in its secular version (Nevsky received the title of the National Hero and Protector of the Fatherland). 99

In modern Russia such religiously inspired dualism has translated, first, into willing acceptance of the authority of the state: “[Russian Orthodox] people do not go protesting [against the state], you can’t hear their voices, instead they pray in the silence of monasteries, in carrells, at home….”100 Patriarch Kirill also trusts that “God can enlighten and strengthen our people on their way to spiritual and moral growth, development of national identity and basic values in the life of our multi-ethnic country.”101 At the same time, the Russian Orthodox Church supports passionate opposition to anyone who challenges the state and thereby the Russians. Speaking in

99 See Hartog.
100 “Statement of His Holiness” n. pag.
101 Ibid.
the aftermath of the Pussy Riot’s infamous punk performance in the Cathedral of the Christ the Savior in February 2013, a leading Church official Vsevolod Chaplin openly called for a violent punishment of the feminist “extremists,” reminding everyone that “when others encroach upon your relatives, Motherland, country, sacred things, you must defend them from this aggression by any means possible. Remember how in earlier days the Church called for arms….To respond to this blasphemy…the state must apply force. If it does not apply force, the people must do it.”

Domineering and subservient motifs that permeate Russian national narratives are not antithetical: they exemplify discursive positions of the hysteric and the obsessional neurotic, which are both dialects of the discourse of radical uncertainty – the discourse of the Hysteric. The identities of the hysteric and the obsessional neurotic similarly depend on the Other, whose mastery, or certainty, is questioned by the subject. The difference is in the precise mechanism of the subject’s relation to the Other. The obsessive national subject perceives the Other of the state as a necessary evil that prevents the national self from disintegrating into meaninglessness. The national subject also emerges in its hysteric role when facing any foreign, non-Russian, non-Orthodox Other, whose enjoyment threatens to compromise the supposed order and stability and thereby the certainty of the national self. As it transpires in analyses of the national fantasy/attitude of neo-fascists, Nashi and Putin, the reactionary/revolutionary structure of the obsessive/hysteric manifests itself in the tragically marked elegiac and epic frames. The frames together contribute to a messianic apocalyptic understanding of Russia’s destiny, a radically obscene view of Russianness as the transcendental truth supposedly jeopardized by the indecent enjoyment of the foreign Other.

102 “Exclusive Interview of Vsevolod Chaplin” n. pag.
To return to a discussion of the Mongol-Tatar invasion and the changes that followed, it is worth mentioning that whereas the degrading political practices of the Golden Horde significantly reduced the authority of most Russian princes, religious tolerance exercised by the invaders favorably positioned the Russian Orthodox Church as the master required by the Russian obsessive ascetic to preserve Russian national identity and restore the political unity of the Russian land.  

Ironically, flourishing under the rule of the Golden Horde, the Orthodox Church of Muscovy served as a consolidating force against infidel Mongol and later Turkish intruders by expressing the messianic aspirations of Orthodox Slavdom. Following the Council of Florence in 1437-1439, when the Russian Church repudiated the arguably treacherous union of the Byzantine Church with the Catholic Church, the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 was viewed as a “prophetic confirmation” of the role of Russian Orthodoxy as the last remaining bastion of true Christianity.

In addition to successfully “gathering the Russian land” and strengthening the single rule of Moscow, Ivan III went down in history as the Russian sovereign who refused to pay tribute and disavowed his loyalty to the Golden Horde, thus ending two centuries of Mongol rule in Russia. Encouraged by his political and military achievements, Ivan the Great saw Moscow as the rightful successor to Kiev, and himself as the sovereign of all Russian lands - “Grand Prince of all Rus.” He was also the first to assume the title of Tsar, meaning “Caesar,” borrowing the

---

103 See Halperin. For more on the relationship of the Mongols with Rus and the historical controversies that surround this topic see Ostrowski; Kamenskii and Griffiths.

104 Aleksandr Kamenskii and David Mark Griffiths note that without the Tatar-Mongol Yoke, which placed the Orthodox Church in the center of Russian nationhood, Russia might not have become a stronghold of Christian Orthodoxy, but might have been catholicized as some parts of southwestern Rus.

105 Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* 56-57. Also see Kamenskii and Griffiths; Duncan.

106 Borrero 13.

107 Borrero 13. Since Kievian Rus has traditionally been considered to be the cradle of Russia - the predecessor of the Muscovite state, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and finally modern Russia - the origins of Ukraine and its relationship with present-day Russia have always been a sensitive issue in Russian and Ukrainian historiography and politics. According to the Russian perspective, Ukraine has not had a history other than the
Byzantine symbol of the two-headed eagle for his family crest after his arranged marriage to Sophia Paleologue, the niece of the last Byzantine emperor. By creating an ever strong bond with the Byzantine Empire, Ivan the Great claimed the legacy of both the Roman Empire and the Christian Church, promoting the messianic ideas of Moscow as the Third Rome and the Second Jerusalem. The motifs of religions messianism translated into a geopolitical argument for Pan-Slavism in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the view of pan-Slavists, the Russians were marked by God to carry out a special mission of uniting all Slavs with an innate Russian spirit of organic community and social justice, as well as “deep-rooted popular confidence in the tsar.”

One of the most notable proponents of pan-Slavism, Dostoyevsky saw the Russian people as a humble nation that welcomes its redemptive suffering. Nurtured by misfortunes, the Russians arguably developed a special ability to empathize with the suffering of other Orthodox nations, and thus it is Russia’s responsibility and even political right to unite all of Slavdom under Russia’s uncontestable patronage:

our nature is infinitely higher than the European. And generally all our conceptions are more moral, and our Russian aims are higher than those of the European world. We have a more direct and noble belief in goodness, goodness as Christianity, and not as a bourgeois solution of the problem of comfort. A great renewal is about to descend on the whole world, through Russian thought (which, you are quite right, is solidly welded with Orthodoxy), and this will be achieved

history of Russia and is an integral part of Russia, while from the Ukrainian point of view, the origins of the Ukrainians as a distinct people can be traced back to medieval Kievan Rus, or even earlier. See Magocsi; Malfliet. See Billington, The Icon and the Axe; Borrero; Duncan; Franklin. More on the relationship of Rus with Byzantium, see Majeska. See Milojković-Djurić; Petrovich. Danilevskii, Russia and Europe 1869, qtd. in Hosking, Russia and the Russians 314.
in less than a hundred years, - this is my passionate belief. But in order that this
great object may be achieved, it is essential that the political right and supremacy
of the Great-Russian race over the whole Slav world should be definitively and
incontestably consummated. (And our little Liberals preach the division of Russia
into federal states!).

Unsurprisingly these xenophobic and racist impulses dominated attitudes of the Russians’ toward
the rest of Europe and the world. Dostoevsky, for instance, hoped “to see political railroads
( Smolensk, Kievan) erected most quickly,… and that there also are new arms very soon.” Pan-
Slavists and proponents of both religious and secular Russian messianism saw their moral and
political duty to force the “truth” and “freedom” on others: “Russian democracy with its tongues
of fire, will…light up all Europe in a bloody glow!”

Today, the messianic apocalyptic idea of Russia’s path, which has been historically
promoted by the Russian state and the church, has extended to what Archpriest Chaplin calls
“Christian patriotism”: “Russia is the third Rome. Russia is the only unenslaved civilization
capable of flourishing as Christian. That is why our patriotism is not chauvinism, not the call of
blood, not unreasonable emotional attachment to the native territory, but primarily an
understanding of the unique Christian mission that…guides our people.” Russia and the
Russian people purportedly never diverged from their national purpose, even during the years of
the Soviet anti-religious politics:

---

111 Murry n.pag. For the original in Russian, see Dostoyevsky, *Collected Writings* 350. On Dostoyevsky’s
ideal of suffering see Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*. On Dostoyevsky’s Russian idea, see Hudspith;
Mochulsky.
112 Dostoyevsky, qtq. in Mochulsky 331. For the original in Russian, see Dostoyevsky, *Collected Writings*
357.
113 Mikhail Bakunin, qtq. in Kelly 131.
114 “Vsevolod Chaplin” n.pag.
our Motherlands even in the Soviet period in some miraculous way strived to maintain an independent, free, truly Christian civilization. If Hitler or any Western leader, who could have replaced him, enslaved Russia, we would never be free. The Soviet soldier and the will of the Soviet leadership defended our freedom and opportunity for authentic Christian revival.115

As I demonstrate in the upcoming analyses, such apocalyptic rewriting of the anti-fascist past of Russia is a distinguishing feature of national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists.

The messianic idea of the Third Rome became a part of Russia’s imperialist ideology and later Soviet ambitions to spread communism globally. With the end of Mongol rule, Russia found itself at a crossroads: whether to sustain the role of the protector of the Orthodox faith, to become an Eastern-Slavic nation-state, or to follow the path of the Golden Horde and transform into a multi-ethnic empire and a great power. The first two options did not seem feasible, since already by the mid-sixteenth century, during the reign of Ivan IV (1533-1584), better known as Ivan the Terrible, Russia annexed the Tatar cities of Kazan and Astrakhan in 1552-1556, thus bringing an influx of non-Christian and non-Slavic population into the country. Since a fully-fledged idea of Russian national identity had not existed before Russia acquired its imperial meaning, the two visions - the imperial and ethno-religious perceptions of Russianness - blurred, causing significant tensions that have run throughout Russian history. The uneasiness of national identity construction was in part an outcome of an unresolved question about whether Russia belonged to the West or the East.116 Anxious to become a great European power, although on a special mission that is inspired by the legacy of the Byzantine East, Russians saw a serious threat in the progressive countries of Western Europe.

115 Ibid.
116 See Shlapentokh; Laruelle; Geraci.
Billington provides an exceptional account of how Russia had been rediscovering the West from the fifteenth through the early seventeenth century and how it influenced Russia’s search for identity. The intense encounters with the economically advanced and culturally sophisticated West in the early modern period were extremely disturbing: they instilled in the Russians both a feeling of fascination with the culture and achievements of the West, and a sense of inferiority and fear. 117 “The Muscovite reaction of irritability and self-assertion,” as Billington artfully puts it, “was in many ways that of a typical adolescent; the Western attitude of patronizing contempt, that of the unsympathetic adult.” 118

Russia’s “awkward, compulsive search for identity in an essentially European world” began with the political and cultural standoff between Muscovy and Novgorod, Russia’s prominent contact with the West. The political subjugation of a Westernized Novgorod by an Eastward-looking Muscovy in the second half of the fifteenth century became the first, but certainly not the last confrontation between Western and Eastern ideas in Russia. Novgorod itself was an epitome of the ideological split between republic and autocracy, cosmopolitanism and xenophobia: the city could boast of “the purest republican government” and, at the same time, it had “the wealthiest ecclesiastical establishment in Eastern Slavdom.” 119 Having secured its authority over its former rival city, Muscovy set to destroy three characteristic Western traditions established in Novgorod: commercial cosmopolitanism, representative government, and philosophic rationalism.

The death of the last of the Russian Rurikids, Ivan the Great’s son Fyodor I, at the very end of the sixteenth century marked the exceptionally catastrophic and painful fifteen years of Russian history known as the Time of Troubles (Smutnoe Vremia). The end of the Muscovite

118 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 78.
119 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 81; Duffy and Ricci 97-101; Hosking, Russia and the Russians 61-65.
dynasty delivered a powerful blow to the Russian mentality since, as noted above, the Russian autocrat was traditionally perceived as the Other of the Russian state - an order that holds together the Russian land and the Russian mind. A chain of economic, social and military disasters followed the dynastic crisis. Distraught by the absence of an heir to the Muscovite throne, weakened by a disastrous famine that slashed the country’s population by a third, shaken by the growth of peasant unrest and Cossack rebellions, Russia presented an attractive geopolitical opportunity for its neighbors from the West: Poland and Sweden.120

A major stumbling rock in Russia-Poland relations has been the matter of religion.121 Ever since Christianity split into two branches - Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodox - in 1054, faith-based conflict has marked the relationship between the countries. In 2000, for example, during his official visit to the Vatican, former President Putin did not return a formal invitation to the Pope to visit Russia, which goes against international diplomatic decorum: the Russian government would not welcome the head of the Vatican until “the dispute between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches is resolved.”122 A year later, to protest against the Pope’s visit to Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox clergy rallied under slogans such as “We will defend the Saint Rus from Catholicism,” and “Orthodox Christians’ tears and blood are on the Pope’s hands.”123

The chaotic interregnum was certainly to Poland’s advantage, since it created an opportunity to bring Russia into the fold of the Catholic Church, as well as to exert political power over the Muscovite land.124 The Time of Troubles was a period of exceptional patriotic upsurge among the Russians, who initially failed to liberate Moscow from the Poles, but later

120 See Gordon; Longworth; Witzenrath.
121 See Skinner.
122 Vinogradov n. pag. See also Andreeva.
123 Chernikov n. pag.; Volkhonskii and Korobov n. pag.
124 See Ransel and Shallcross.
defeated Poland and Sweden. Driven by the rebellious hysterics’s enmity against the West (particularly the Poles) and, just as in the earlier times of the appanage and the Tatar Mongol Yoke, united in a subservient obsessive fashion behind the Orthodox Church, the Russians managed to restore order and to end the interregnum.

For about four decades following the Time of Troubles, the Church moved to the tsar as close as ever: distressed by the prior events - social disturbances and foreign invasions - the churchmen and aristocracy supported Tsar Mikhail I (1613-1645) zealously. Moreover, Mikhail’s father, Filaret, was appointed as Patriarch of the Orthodox Church and given the title of Great Sovereign. Though the Time of Troubles left the Church extremely conservative and the Russians suspicious of the West, Russia soon renewed its interest in the West (as well as the East) to pursue its imperial ambitions. With an exception of a short spell in the early 1990s, when Russians were briefly inspired by the prospects of becoming a liberal democracy, the distrust toward the West and contempt for the supposedly immoral Western way of life, along with the insistent desire to catch up with and even dominate the West politically, economically, and technologically, became a major element in the process of Russian national identity construction for centuries to come. The spirit of the national triumph over the enemies from the West that the Time of Troubles ended with is now commemorated every year on National Unity Day (November 4), which celebrates Russia’s victory over the Polish invaders in 1612. However, as mentioned earlier, this holiday is better known for so-called Russian Marches - demonstrations organized by neo-fascist, ultra-nationalist and anti-immigrant activists in major cities in Russia on this day each year since 2005.

The calamities of the Time of Troubles were read by many Russians as God’s revenge for losing the true faith: most of the clergy, supported by many laypeople, attempted to bring back

125 See Trepanier.
pristine Russian Orthodoxy through acetic practices, such as strict fasting, increased discipline, regular confessions, restriction of entertainment and so on. Assuming responsibility to provide the whole Christian Orthodox world with authentic Orthodoxy, reformers close to Aleksei I (1645-1676), known as Zealots of Piety (revniteli blagocheściia), or Lovers of God (bogolubtsy) insisted on bringing Russian Orthodox practice - rituals, liturgies, scriptures - in line with the rites of other Orthodox Churches, particularly with the Greeks. The clash between the reformers and those who resisted modernization and unification of the Russian Church, aptly named Old Believers (starovery or staroobрядцы), was more than a split between the modernizers and the conservatives in the monastic realm: the ecclesiastic division exposed momentous tendencies in seventeenth century Muscovy that were to have far-reaching consequences in the history of Russia. As Billington notes, the implications of the Great Church Schism of 1667 can be compared with those of the Russian Revolution of 1917, since both events became “a point of no return in Russian history.”

The division in the Russian Church in the second half of the seventeenth century was described in chronicles with the Russian words khistrost’ (guile, deception, shrewdness) and blagocheśćie (vehement dedication, fervid faith) - the former was used in association with Western knowledge and skills, while the latter stood for “ardent loyalty” to the Church, the sacred past and the God-like figure of the monarch. It is unfortunate that since the time of the standoff between Muscovy and Novgorod education and knowledge had been conceived as dangerous and even sinful. Such an inherently tragic worldview, for example, elucidates the origins of a famous proverb “opinion is the mother to all suffering, opinion is the second fall,” as

---

126 See Kizenko.
127 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 121. See also West.
128 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 122.
well as the meaning of the phrase “to go into books” - “to go out one’s mind.” Just as the rationalistic critical thinking of Novgorod was crushed by obsessively religious Muscovy under Ivan III, so a few centuries later any element of modernization - commerce, technology, science - was perceived to be a deceit of an honest Russian muzhik by the heretic West. It was a peculiar mixture of conservatism, spiritualism, xenophobia, as well as an anti-Jewish attitude, that precluded Russia from adopting whatever positive the West had to offer, however, without having to dismiss modernization completely.

When ecclesiastic reformers, including some Russian autocrats (most notably, Peter the Great), began their attack on Russian religious and cultural traditions for the sake of progress, foreign practices and thinking were still perceived by the Russians as something alien. “Dualism and the absence of a neutral axiological zone” (a fundamental feature of Russian mentality), along with a weak sense of nationhood prior to Russia’s interaction with the West, prevented the Russians from forming a balanced view of the West, particularly its cultural, political and economic achievements. The response to increased interaction with the West was “almost schizophrenic:” the split between pro-Western and anti-Western mindset - what in the nineteenth century came to be known as the controversy between the Westernizers and Slavophiles - has survived till the present.

While from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, the fear in official Muscovy was primarily that of the Catholic “Latins,” a stronger xenophobic reaction against the Protestant “Germans” swept across Russia during the late years of Ivan IV’s reign. More than ever...
before, the Muscovy of Ivan the Terrible found itself in absolute “political uncertainty and ideological confusion.” An “ostensibly xenophobic and traditionalist” ruler, a devoted advocate of total autocracy and a self-professed enemy of the Protestant West, Ivan IV, in an ironic turn of events, opened the country for large-scale Westernization and summoned a representative assembly (zemskii sobor). Eventually disturbed by the changes brought about through the process of Westernization, that is, encompassing practices that steered the country away from its “sacred past and the internal solidarity between the sovereign, church, and family, on which Muscovite civilization was based,” Ivan immersed Russia in terror with the help of Russia’s first secret police: the oprichniki.

The early eighteenth century modernizing reforms, carried out by Peter I, or Peter the Great (1682-1725), resulted in even greater shock for the Russians: the growth of Russia as a modern, multi-ethnic secular state was detrimental to the old Russian view of themselves as a pious Christian Orthodox nation loyal to its divine tsar. The need to build and sustain Russia as a European great power, which it was already by the end of the seventeenth century, required steady technological progress, significant military achievements, and, at least, an appearance of cultural and religious tolerance. Russian culture was marked by Polish (yet not Catholic) influences, while Swedish, German and Dutch (but not Protestant) influences were apparent in the country’s administrative and military spheres. Invited foreign specialists formed the new service nobility, known as dvorianstvo, or “men of the court,” and replaced the old traditional

---

135 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 103.
136 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 97.
137 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 103.
138 On the political and cultural significance of the historic figure of Peter the Great, see Riasanovsky, The Image of Peter the Great.
139 On Peter’s reforms, see Hughes; Cracraft.
landowning aristocracy. In addition to his innovations and transformations, Peter I started calling himself an emperor and moved the capital from conservative Moscow - a bastion of Old Russia - to cosmopolitan Saint Petersburg - a symbol of the new, enlightened Russian Empire.

Having subdued a rival for state authority, the Russian Orthodox Church, Peter the Great substituted the religious messianic idea of the Third Rome with a new form of messianism – a zealous dedication to education and progress. A similar preoccupation with economic and technical growth determined the politics of the USSR and is a defining feature of modern Russia’s objective to “be competitive in everything.” Inspired by the European Enlightenment, Peter the Great’s reforms could have potentially opened the Russians to a comic national self-awareness. This, however, did not happen in Peter’s Russia and would not either happen later in the Soviet Union and Putin’s Russia. Just as other Europeans monarchs in the seventeenth century, Peter the Great relied on enlightened despotism, where knowledge and progress were merely used as instruments of boosting the power of the state both at home and abroad.

Since the idea of active learning and mastering new skills in attempts to bring out a profound change (which for Russia virtually always involved Westernization of its economy, politics and culture) was antithetical to the conservative and resigned mind of the Russian ascetic, it is only owing to the insistence of the Russian autocrat, as Ragsdale argues, that a process of modernization in Russia was made possible. While this argument holds true with regard to modernization processes of Petrine Russia and late imperial Russia, which largely involved industrialization, expansion of commerce and dissemination of education, which were rejected by the masses and intellectuals defending a purportedly true Russian way of life, in the

---

140 Billington suggests that the term men of the court indicated an increasing interdependence between the tsar and nobility. Also see Yanov.

141 See Hosking, Russia; Hosking, Russia and the Russians.

142 “Vladimir Putin’s Answers to Questions at the Meeting with His Authorized Representatives” n. pag.
Soviet Union and in modern Russia the state’s aspirations for economic advancement and social improvement were widely welcomed and actually boosted the authority of state power.

The Russian people, for example, enthusiastically responded to the call of Soviet leaders “to catch up with and surpass” the West (more specifically, the U.S.). The state rhetoric of post-Soviet Russia has also been saturated with sentiments of economic and technological advancement. Acknowledging the pressing need for Russia to integrate into the global economy, Putin reiterates that “only those who fully utilize new [technological and economic] opportunities win.” This can be explained by the fact that the passive, obsessive quality of the Russian ascetic mind approximates in its tragic impulse the nation’s active pursuit of economic and technological success, provided the latter is instrumental in the nation’s confrontation with the national other.

Nevertheless, considering the dramatically distinct socio-political and economic circumstances in early modern Russia, including the fact that the Russian clergy was threatened by the reforms, and given the overwhelming illiteracy of the majority of the population, the strength with which the Petrine reforms were rejected among conservative and religious Russians is not surprising. The ideology of the new secular multi-national empire was met by two intense forces - Old Believer communalism and Cossack inspired peasant insurrectionism.

Different, yet mutually reinforcing, these two forces not only shaped the historical dispute between Old and New Russia, but also defined all the oppositional forces under the Romanovs, including those that led to the Russian Revolution of 1917. Both the products of the religious awakening of the Time of Trouble, the traditions of Old Believers and peasant

---

143 See Hasanli 210-211. Jacobson 207-207, 250-251; Kozhevkivov 245-246; Lundestad 18; Melvin 418; Trotsky.
144 Putin, “On Our Economic Goals” n. pag.
145 On the history of Russian serfdom, see Moon.
insurrectionists morphed into distinctive, yet loosely organized movements, in particular, as a hostile reaction to Peter I’s modernizing attempts. While the merchants, who made up the core of the Old Believer movement, protested against the growth of the central government and the restrictions it imposed on the old urban communities, Cossack-led peasant rebels challenged lifetime peasant servitude and the twenty-five-year military service obligation. Moreover, the movements were aboil with indignation over the luxurious life of the Westernized court and disturbed by women monarchs who almost continually ruled Russia till the end of the eighteenth century.

From the middle of the seventeenth century the Russians suffered, in Billington’s words, from an “eschatological psychosis”: the Church Schism followed by Russia’s painful transformation into a multi-national empire incited apocalyptic fears in many Russians. Although not exactly psychotic, the Russians experienced a profound national trauma. If by tradition Russian monarchs were regarded as God’s representatives, “messianic deliverer[s],” or, in other words, the Other, Peter the Great was proclaimed the Antichrist. Amidst anxiety over the impending end of the world, associated with the exposed lack of the Other of the state, the Old Believers, as well as representatives of the monastic revival (another, yet less prominent religious movement), in accordance with a religious belief in the redemptive power of suffering, withdrew from the political and intellectual life of the country. Since neither the official Church nor the tsar (or emperor) was no longer the guarantor of “true” Russianness, they moved closer to the common folk: pious, uncorrupt Russians, bearers of true faith. Later the idea of redemptive salvation by leading a simple, ascetic life was extended over the secular realm to give rise to

---

146 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 139.
147 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 198; Also see Riasanovsky, Russian Identities. It is important to point out that Peter the Great, however, did not forsake Orthodox Christianity: his ideal was to infuse monarchical authority, rather than the personal figure of the monarch, with divine power. Several decades later, it was Catherine the Great who, just like Vladimir Lenin would in the USSR, divorced the state and the Church completely.
Russian Freemasonry in the second half of the eighteenth century and, a century later, to Russian populism (*khozhdenie v narod*, pilgrimage to the people).

Disgusted by the licentious, extravagant life of Catherine II’s Francomanic court, rather than by their own privileged status, the conflicted and self-hating Russian aristocracy renounced their foreign ways and found the source of spiritual rejuvenation in Freemasonry. It is worth mentioning briefly that Russian Freemasonry acquired two distinct yet interrelated forms: the first-phase Masonic order was a practically-oriented philanthropic St. Petersburg based organization, while the second-phase Masonic order was a mystical, contemplative Moscow-based Lodge.\(^{148}\) St. Petersburg’s Lodge did not distinguish itself much from the superficial life of the court. In contrast, the latter was largely concerned with the issues of religious and national self-consciousness: the second-phase Masonry was “leading men’s gaze back to the idealized rural and religious culture of Muscovy.”\(^ {149}\) First, engaged primarily in education and philanthropy, and later guided by a broader “seductive belief in the realizability of heaven on earth through the concentrated efforts of consecrated thinkers,” Russian Freemasonry shaped a new *intelligentnoe soslovie* - a class of intellectuals between the traditional aristocracy and the peasantry, as well as separate from the state.\(^ {150}\) The role of Freemasonry in Russian social thought is very difficult to overestimate: the secret society was a sign of burgeoning, albeit fragile, tradition of critical thought in Russia. Freemasonry “had charged the air with expectation and created a sense of solidarity among those searching for truth…Most important, ideas were creating a thirst for action.”\(^ {151}\)

---

148 The split between rational and mystic forms of Russian Freemasonry was the precursor of the momentous division between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles in the nineteenth century.
149 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 246.
150 Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* 251. On the origin of the word *intelligentsia* and on the history of the class, see Hamburg; Wayne.
151 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 258.
From the 1840s to the early 1880s Russia saw an unprecedented preoccupation with obshchestvennaia mysľ (“social thought”). This, according to Billington, was both a delayed response to revolutionary events that occurred in France between 1830 and 1848 and an expression of Russian intellectuals’ desire of a better life for the masses. Unlike similar aspirations in Western Europe, longing for transformation carried social rather than political significance: many expected the monarch to become a source of reforms, the most significant of which was considered to be the emancipation of the serfs. Following the familial model of the public/private, Russian intellectuals saw an opportunity for Russia’s advancement not in a robust civil society, but in a simple communal life of people distant from politics.152

The two most important intellectual currents of the early nineteenth century, as noted earlier, were the Westernizers and the Slavophiles.153 According to the latter, while the Western way of life “had been devoured by the cancer of rationalism,” Russia had a brighter future.154 The supposedly perverse nature of Western democracy, characterized by hostility, violence and slavery, they argued, was inferior to authentic Russian rule, founded on the principles of spirituality, truth and freedom (expressed in the tradition of sobornost). Unlike liberal democrats who purportedly promoted a new kind of despotism – “a liberal ‘aristocracy of wealth’,” authentic democrats were conceived by the Slavophiles as egalitarian socialists, and purportedly true democracy was recognized as an intrinsic component of the Russian way of life: “We shall always remain democrats, standing for purely human ideals and blessing every tribe to live and develop in peace in its own way.”155 While, unlike the Slavophiles, the Westernizers discarded the traditional Russian practices, including “the social and moral-psychological tradition of

---

152 See Billington, The Icon and the Axe 371-373, 377.
153 See Allensworth; Leatherbarrow; Tolz; Offord; McDaniel. On the larger implications of Slavophile thought, see Engelstein.
154 Snyder 286.
serfdom and the ancient communality of the ‘mir’” as backward, and advocated for Russia to follow the European trajectory of development, both the Slavophiles and the Westernizers as two nationalist philosophies advocated a unique path for Russia’s development as an ever-growing empire.156

Over the last decades of the nineteenth century, Slavophilism grew into imperial chauvinism and Pan-Slavism: those new forms of Russian nationalism were based on pride (lack of humility) and insensitivity to reason. Orthodox messianism of the first generation of the Slavophiles was substituted with geopolitical thinking in the second phase of Slavophilism: the supposed spiritual decay of the West, as well as Russia’s national interests, became a moral basis for Russia’s imperial expansionist politics. At the turn of the twentieth century, the third generation of Slavophilism turned to “unbridled anti-Semitism.”157

Although an anti-Jewish attitude was part of the Russian national outlook as early as the sixteenth century, it became especially prominent in tsarist Russia.158 Imported from the West, this tragic attitude struck the chords of the Russians for several reasons. The Jews were perceived as a religious foe and later as an ethnic enemy of the “Slavic” or “Aryan Russian” race. Being a product of classical peasant animosity toward the commercial and intellectual life of the city, anti-Semitic attitudes in Russia were amplified in Slavophilism. As Alexander Orbach points out, the philosophy of Slavophiles was inimical to Western practices and ideals of individualism,

156 McDaniel 12. The peasant commune or mir exemplifies the principle of sobornost.
157 Parland 22.
158 While Billington asserts that Russian anti-Semitism dates back to the times of the Muscovite Russia, Vadim Rossman, for example, argues that the rise of anti-Semitism in Russia is closely related to the rise of radical pan-Slavism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, Hosking emphasizes that although being thoroughly anti-Semitic, the Tsarist state was wary of encouraging anti-Jewish pogroms, since they as both a violent disorderly action and interethic conflict potentially posed a threat to the law and order of the state and the integrity of the multi-ethnic empire respectively. See Billington, The Icon and the Axe (especially 72); Rossman; Hosking, Russia and the Russians 341-344.
capitalism and political liberalism, which in its turn did not leave the Jews any chance to become a part of Russian culture.\textsuperscript{159}

The revolutionary potential of progressive ideas, which resulted in the decline of absolute rule of monarchs and the Church in Western Europe, as well as an increasing idealization of peasant life as a bastion of national purity, caused by the principal preoccupation of the state with modernization along Western standards, made Russian autocrats take a step back, as they feared for their thrones.\textsuperscript{160} By the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries the Russian state plunged into conservative nationalism, which since then almost continually fostered a sense of cultural superiority and Russian (primarily religious and pan-Slavic, though later also social and political) messianism.

The reign of Alexander I (1801-1825) can be fairly characterized as an interlude of neo-Enlightenment, as it followed the despotic last years of Catherine II, the tyrannical regime of Paul I (1796-1801), and preceded the even more reactionary regime of Nicholas I (1825-1855): “the new ruler stood as the very embodiment of the humanness, progressiveness, affirmation of human dignity, and freedom that educated Russians fervently desired.”\textsuperscript{161} The beginning of the nineteenth century in Russia was full of hopes for major political and social reforms, yet Alexander I was not decisive enough to go through with them: to limit autocracy and abolish serfdom.

The year of 1812, when Russia defeated Napoleon, started the second, mostly reactionary period of Alexander’s reign. The victory over Napoleon encouraged the monarch to view himself not just as savior of Russia but of all Europe: Alexander I “felt he had a special mission.”\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{159} Orbach.
\textsuperscript{160} See Leatherbarrow; Jenks.
\textsuperscript{161} Riasanovsky, \textit{Russian Identities} 113.
\textsuperscript{162} Florovski n. pag.
Following his participation in the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and full of determination to preserve peace in Europe and prevent atheism and revolutionary impulses from spreading, the monarch joined the Holy Synod with the Ministry of Education to create the Ministry of Spiritual Affairs and Popular Enlightenment: the “ministry of religious-utopian propaganda.” This new institutional hybrid was charged with reforming Russians into “ecumenically minded Christians in whom better education, Bibles in the vernacular...and participation in organized philanthropy would instill benevolence, self-discipline, a sense of social responsibility and a heightened civic consciousness.” Alexander’s aspiration, as Dominic Lieven asserts, was to build a “cohesive, authoritarian, mildly progressive polity,” rested on the traditions of mutual respect between the state and the people.

Alexander’s version of a great European state clashed violently against the realities of early nineteenth century imperial Russia: debilitating serfdom, strong authoritarian rule, religious and cultural assimilation of the non-Christian, non-Russian population. The Decembrists (Russian army officers, members of a secret society - the Union of Salvation, later renamed as the Union of Welfare) were infused with determination to transform Russian autocracy into a constitutional monarchy, institute the rule of law and reform serfdom. Yet, the hopes of the Decembrists “to prod [the] nation into political and moral greatness commensurable with the military greatness assured by [the Russian military heroes] Suvorov and Kutuzov” were quashed by Alexander’s brother, Nicholas I (1825-1855). As a result, no significant relaxation of monarchical rule happened until the beginning of the twentieth century. On the contrary,

164 Lieven 158.
165 Lieven 158.
166 Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* 266.
Nicholas I, who came to be known as Europe’s gendarme, immersed the country in conservatism and extreme nationalism.

Convinced by his Minister of Education, Sergey Uvarov, that Russia was in dire need of a coherent national idea, Nicholas I introduced the theory of Official Nationality, founded on the notions of autocracy (*samoderzhavie*), Orthodoxy (*pravoslavie*), and nationality, or better said, national outlook (*narodnost*). Russia no longer aspired to be a secular multi-ethnic Enlightened European state of the Petrine design. Now, warned by the French Revolution and the Decembrist revolt, buttressed by a “contempt for [Napoleon] and uncompromising love for the Mother Russia that he attacked,” the state adopted an ideology of *national absolutism*.167

The messianic and imperial ambitions of Russia in the mid-nineteenth century were dramatically halted by its defeat in the Crimean war of 1853-1856.168 The defeat not only shattered Russia’s reputation as a European great power, but also was detrimental to the political stability and security of monarchy within the country. As Hosking notes, the precarious position of Russia in the international arena gave rise to political movements aiming to topple the monarchy. Thus even the most conservative statesmen saw the dire need to return to the policy of Westernization, which was equated with the economic and technological advancement of the country. At the same time the problem with modernization in a Western fashion, as the history of Western Europe demonstrated, was that it necessarily incited profound political changes which challenged the very existence of monarchy and empire.

The new economic reforms aimed at fostering prosperity among the poverty-stricken masses, who could not be exploited any further, as well as Russia’s industrialization, brought about the long-awaited emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and significant changes in Russia’s

---

167 Snyder 284.
168 On the Crimean War, see Curtiss; Figes; Seaton.
education system. In the 1860s universities opened their doors for newly emancipated peasants. To pursue higher education was considered as advancement on a social ladder for anybody except students from noble and wealthy families. While the emancipation terms financially crippled the peasantry, sending peasants “into a deepening spiral of indebtedness and poverty,” the education reform proved to be more progressive and therefore put the security of autocratic power in jeopardy.169 Fostering a new generation of experts qualified to carry out tasks of modernization inadvertently led to the proliferation of independent critical thought. At last, a critical public sphere, or obschestvennost, emerged in Russia. It is peculiar that while modern Russian thought was indebted greatly to Western ideas, it failed to fully retain their progressive comic significance. Superimposed on inherently tragic notions of sobornost and Russian messianism, which manifested themselves in a traditional disregard for the political freedom of both Russian people and other nations, a philosophical doctrine of socialism, became, oddly, “a defense against the West…and a superior form of the West against an outmoded form of the West.”170 Among the most influential appropriations of socialism were the ideologies of the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Marxists.

Before the socialist revolutionaries emerged as an organized political force, they initially emerged as the Russian populist movement of khozhdenie v narod. This “grassroots movement” was also known as narodnichestvo, and those who participated in it were called narodniki. Narodniki were predominately university students who came from families of merchants, artisans, artists, doctors, teachers, and so on; in other words, from meschanstvo, the Russian equivalent of the modern middle class. Russian populists criticized the state for newly introduced economic and fiscal policies that arguably contradicted what was perceived to be the true

169 Hosking, Russia and the Russians 358.
170 Ragsdale 181.
Russian spirit. In line with Charles-Louis de Secondat Baron de Montesquieu’s concept of national character, with which they were likely familiar, narodniki considered the Russians to be “naturally” predisposed to a communal type of life.

According to Montesquieu, a general spirit of the nation is shaped by a variety of static elements and dynamic factors: “climate, religion, laws, the maxims of the government, examples of past things, mores, and manners….“\textsuperscript{171} Depending on which of “these causes acts more forcefully” each nation acquires certain immutable features. Speaking on the role of climate, Montesquieu, for example, asserts that it conditions some nations into cherishing freedom and impels other nations to readily dispense of it. Besides, Montesquieu argues that the state’s laws and form of government must correspond to the nation’s native temperament. Although Lacan’s psychoanalysis too takes into consideration the role of the Real as sensible, the national subject’s defensive reaction to it cannot be viewed as something objective and determinate. National identity is not in a direct causal relationship with external circumstances, but an indeterminate process of negotiation of the fundamental tension between how people perceive themselves and others.

The Russian populist movement was conceived around a rather naïve faith in the peasant commune as the last source of the supposedly true Russian mentality and an unadulterated familial way of life, and so members of the movement advocated for socio-economic equality and political liberty, which would amount to a peculiar form of Russian socialism. While it has its roots in Western Europe, the doctrine of socialism acquired a specific Russian cultural meaning: “[i]t elevated to an ideal the egalitarian, self-contained, and participatory peasant land commune and workers’ artel.”\textsuperscript{172} Although many proponents of Russian socialism were atheists,\textsuperscript{171} Montesquieu 310 \textsuperscript{172} Hosking, Russia and the Russians 306.
the old religious idea of *sobornost*, or the pristine spirit of human solidarity, as well as the 
mesianic aspirations of “Holy Rus,” inspired Russian radical intellectuals of the nineteenth 
century to see the Russian peasant commune as the only source of salvation – salvation from the 
tyranny of the tsar and aristocracy at home and the soulless rationality and individualism of the 
West.

It turned out that Russian peasants, however, were as hostile to *narodniki* - who 
attempted to relieve peasants from oppression - as the latter were to their landlords - those who 
were directly responsible for the peasants’ plight. Meanwhile, Russian peasants remained loyal 
to the tsar who in their eyes always remained, with the exception of Peter the Great, the “true 
tsar,” “tsar-batiushka” (“tsar and the good father”), divine savior, or the Master of the obsessive 
Russian *muzhik*. While neither the Pan-Slav program nor Russian populism were able to 
mobilize the masses, a strong sense of hostility felt toward the Jewish population of Russia 
moved peasants to action. Pogroms, or anti-Jewish riots, broke out in Russia at the end of the 
nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century: “There outbreaks of destructive frenzy 
were products of rapid economic growth and population movement, and then of radical political 
change, all of which reawakened old popular resentments against a people who seemed to have 
done well out of disrupting a traditional [Russian] way of life.”

What tragically brought together the Russian state, the Russian intellectuals and the 
common Russian people was an idea of the national enemy who must be overpowered by all 
means possible. Nicholas II (1894-1917) took advantage of a surge in popular anti-Semitism to 
unite the masses, the clergy and the aristocracy around ideas of Russian national absolutism: he

---

173 As their peaceful measures of propaganda did not bring the desired effect, *narodniki* - who by the late 
1890s transformed in the Socialist Revolutionary Party - turned to violence against the regime.

174 Hosking, *Russia and the Russians* 343. On pogroms, see Sam Johnson; Klier; Klie and Lambroza; 
Weinberg.
extended moral and financial patronage to armed squads (also known as black hundreds) of people who “became enraged by the insolence and audacity of the revolutionaries and socialists…nine-tenth of [whom] are Yids.”\textsuperscript{175} Black hundreds, which were organized around the Union of Russian People (SRN), became “a halfway house between the old-fashioned reactionary movements of the nineteenth century and the right-wing populist (fascist) parties of the twentieth.”\textsuperscript{176}

Without denying the role of racist and religious motifs that moved Russian anti-Semitism, the state employed the black hundreds mostly pragmatically or cynically – to counter each and every force that threatened the autocratic rule of the tsar in any way. Both in the USSR and later in modern Russia the part of the menacing national other from outside was most often assigned to the West, while the national enemy within, or in Putin’s words, “a fifth column” and “national traitors,” was the Jews, other “unreliable” ethnic groups, and Russia’s liberal opposition.\textsuperscript{177} The SRN and black hundreds in a sense became a precursor of state-sponsored hatred and violence, which is discussed in Chapter Five.

The Soviet ideology appropriated a few pre-Revolutionary discourses of expectionalism, the most powerful of which was Slavophilism. More precisely, Soviet Communism was “a strange amalgam” and “odd jumble” of Marxism as a legacy of German idealism and English economic history, the Slavophiles-inspired Russian idea and the Petrine zeal for modernization and progress, to which Slavophilism was paradoxically unsympathetic.\textsuperscript{178} One of the major principles structuring the vision of Russia in the twentieth century was Soviet internationalism. Lenin believed that nationalities had to be dissolved on the way to a supranational world of

\textsuperscript{175} “Perepiska Nikolaia II i Marii Fedorovny,” qtq in Hosking, \textit{Russia and the Russians} 343.
\textsuperscript{176} Laqueur, \textit{Black Hundred} 16.
\textsuperscript{177} Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” 2014, n. pag.
\textsuperscript{178} McDaniel 83, 89.
socialism. Nation-centered ideas once prominent in Slavophilism and pan-Slavism were superseded by the rhetoric of internationalism and “the friendship of nations,” however, only in appearance.\(^{179}\) In reality, the ideological proximity of the Bolsheviks and the supporters of the Russian idea led to the emergence of “a new red-white, or later even red-white-brown, ideology called national bolshevism.”\(^{180}\)

On the surface, Soviet leaders, including Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin and Mikhail Gorbachev, welcomed ethnic diversity and even defended nations’ “right to arrange their affairs as they please;…a right to preserve any of their national institutions, whether beneficial or harmful – nobody can (nobody has a right to!) forcibly interfere in the life of a nation.”\(^{181}\) By promising to respect the right of nationalities for self-determination, Lenin solicited great support for the October Revolution. In the same spirit, Gorbachev acknowledged that “interference in those internal processes with the aim of altering them according to someone else’s prescription would be all the more destructive for the emergence of a peaceful order.”\(^{182}\) Furthermore, in his essay “Marxism and the National Question” Stalin insisted that “the complete democratization of the country is the basis and condition for the solution of the national question.”\(^{183}\) As Stalin argued, a decision to “permit [a minority] to use its native language,” to “possess [their] own schools” and to “enjoy liberty of conscience (religious liberty), liberty of movement, etc.” would have resolved ethnic tensions and consequently would have rendered ethnic differences obsolete, thus leaving “the workers of all nationalities of Russia [united] into single, integral collective bodies” and as such focused on the common task. Unlike Stalin, who never truly entertained

\(^{179}\) The Soviet state was less repressive toward non-Russians living in the USSR than under the tsarist rule: cultural diversity and tolerance were taught in school and propagated in Soviet society. Yet, as Walter Laqueur notes, the word “anti-Sovietism” was often interpreted as “Russophobia.” See Laqueur, *Black Hundred.*

\(^{180}\) Parland 32.

\(^{181}\) Stalin n. pag.

\(^{182}\) Gorbachev 17.

\(^{183}\) Stalin n. pag.
even an idea of granting a Soviet republic equal political rights, Gorbachev believed, perhaps sincerely, that although “[i]n the past, [national] differences often served as a factor in pulling away from one another…[n]ow they are being given the opportunity to be a factor in mutual enrichment and attraction.” This comic guarantee of freedom, however, turned out to be no more than an empty gesture.

The formal nature of the gesture was obvious even before attempts to secede from the Soviet Union were decisively suppressed: from the Soviet communist view freedom of self-determination was modeled on sobornost, or a tragic understanding of truth and choice. By insisting on the primacy or the ultimate truth of the proletariat’s interests, Stalin emphasized the need:

to influence the will of nations so that the nations may arrange their affairs in the way that will best correspond to the interests of the proletariat. For this reason Social-Democracy, while fighting for the right of nations to self-determination, will at the same time agitate, for instance, against the secession of the Tatars, or against cultural-national autonomy for the Caucasian nations; for both, while not contradicting the rights of these nations, do contradict “the precise meaning” of the [Russian Marxists’] programme, i.e., the interests of the Caucasian proletariat.

In other words, ethnic diversity of the Soviet Union was tolerated and even celebrated as long as it was perceived as inconsequential and a matter of “cosmetic” ethnic variations. When ethnic peculiarities became vocal and politically menacing to the unity of the Soviet state, the

---

184 Gorbachev 17. See also Grachev.
185 Stalin n. pag.
Communist Party fought those anti-Communist “nationalist deviations” with fervor.\textsuperscript{186} Stalin, for example, wrestled local nationalisms by deporting supposedly dangerous and disloyal ethnic groups to Siberia and other regions aiming to inhibit the growth of national resistance and in effect to guarantee the security and integrity of the USSR. In solidarity with the Soviet Union’s disregard for the political will of other states and nations, Putin, when invited to comment on historical significance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, stated that “this pact did make sense in terms of guaranteeing the Soviet Union’s security.”\textsuperscript{187}

Although nationalism was condemned as “a bourgeois struggle,” Russian ethnocentricity became a useful tool in the hands of the Bolshevik Party.\textsuperscript{188} Under the theatrical cloak of internationalism and “the friendship of the peoples,” the Soviet ideology was in fact imbued with ideas of Russian imperial messianism and “superior Russian ways.”\textsuperscript{189} Popular and often simplified Russian sentiments about the developed and dynamic West, on the one hand, and the stagnant and superstitious East, on the other, contributed to the country’s eagerness to prove its place in the world and “help” Asian ethnic minorities - supposedly backward and dangerous peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia - to transform their “primitive” ways of life.\textsuperscript{190}

The spirit of nationalism under the guise of Soviet patriotism was spread by celebrating the country’s history (to be more precise, Russian history), by cultivating a sense of pride and love for the country. In the introduction to “the best” textbook on the history of the USSR, for

\textsuperscript{186} Gitelman 466.
\textsuperscript{187} “Press Statement and Replies to Journalists’ Questions” n.pag. According to Nikita Petrov, a senior researcher at the Memorial Foundation, which explores the Great Purge of Stalinist Russia, Putin’s positive evaluation of the pact is “really a reflection of today’s politics. These days in Russia, we are seeing a return to the methods of division into spheres of influence, secret deals. That’s why - especially this year - we are seeing all these calls for a second Yalta, a second Helsinki. They are the product of this harmful idea that the world can be divided, carved up, and that such an agreement can be secretly reached by the same principles that were used by totalitarian Germany and the Soviet Union.” Coalson n. pag.
\textsuperscript{188} Stalin n. pag.
\textsuperscript{189} Snyder 307.
\textsuperscript{190} See Jahn.
example, the image of the USSR as an exceptional (“only one Socialist country in the world”), rich (“our country is the richest in the world,” “more prosperous all the time”), successful (“our country was a backward country now it has become the most advanced and mighty country in the world”), multicultural (“in no other country in the world is there such friendship among the various peoples as in the USSR”), just (“all the peoples of the USSR work for the common good,” “all of us work for ourselves, and not for parasites”), and resistant (“the people of the USSR fought their oppressors and enemies”) country was constructed.\(^{191}\)

By the time the USSR realized the immediacy of the threat posed by the tragically obscene Other of Hitler’s Germany (and the consequences of having signed the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact), tragic national sentiments had forged Communist ideology. The very pact demonstrated that what counted was strength and power, rather than political liberties and international laws. Rethinking the legacy of the Soviet Union’s fight with fascism, Antifa members, for instance, point out that “in the Soviet Union we were not told…why one had to be an anti-fascist; we were only told that Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and therefore it was an enemy. There were no discussions about what was going on in the Soviet Union….”\(^{192}\)

Although the Soviet people demonstrated truly selfless, comic heroism when confronted with the horrifying Realness of the war, the state never fought fascism from a legitimately comic position – by defending political liberties and freedom as such.

Shaped by distinctly conservative and tragic political ideas and social practices, such as dominance of the state and the church in the socio-political life of the country, as well as popular support of military chauvinism, xenophobia and racism, the Russian idea has so far manifested itself as an aggressive hysterical posture complemented with obsessive resignation from freedom.

\(^{191}\) Snyder 301.
\(^{192}\) “Activists Discussed” n. pag.
to make politically consequential choices. Ravaged by the radical ambiguity of the national self, acutely experienced in Russia’s everlasting pursuit of statehood, the Russian national subject seeks solace in the purportedly apolitical, determinate space of spiritual communal life, which it is ready to defend with its life.

Taking into account that at present Russia cannot afford to be perceived as an aggressive tragic national subject and thus to be isolated from the West, competing national narratives often invoke Russia’s national democratic tradition – “the rule of the Russians with their own traditions of national self-government without standards imposed on us from outside” – to justify the country’s pursuit of political, economic and/or military stability and strength. As the above brief overview of the articulatory history of the Russian idea reveals, Russia’s attempts at democracy, however, have been comic only on the surface; at bottom they comprise the least ethically consuming and the most forceful solutions to the national subject’s radical ambiguity.

---

4 THE TRAGIC NARRATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN NEO-FASCIST MASTER

As extreme nationalist attitudes have been gradually intensifying during Putin’s presidency, more journalists, scholars and politicians started drawing parallels between post-Soviet Russia and late Weimar Germany, voicing their concerns about the arguably ascendant fascist trend in the country (some went so far as to compare Putin to Hitler).¹ There are, however, those who have cautioned against such comparisons, deeming them either unjustified or outright provocative.² The disagreement about whether fascist ideas have permeated the mainstream national vision or have been a merely marginal and thus inconsequential element of Russian politics hinges on, first, how fascism is defined and, second, whether political actors that promote fascist views are to be approached as mad and irrational.

Since the present study is centered on the employment of the word fascism in competing national narratives, and this chapter in particular is dedicated to a psycho-rhetorical reading of national ideas promoted by representatives of the Russian extreme right, I must, first, address the question of what counts as fascism, considering both the circumstances of contemporary Russia and a long history of Russian conservative thought. Second, I discuss whether fascist beliefs, including contemporary Russian fascist attitudes, should be viewed in terms of pathology (more specifically, psychosis and perversion) and irrationality from a Lacanian point of view. Finally, I briefly mention major events that contributed to the shaping of the national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists and examine the psycho-rhetorical narrative of the latter both on the Imaginary and Symbolic levels.

¹ See Chotiner; Goble; Garver; Iampolski; Johnson; Motyl; “Putin’s Fascist Russia”; Rucker; “Russia Has Turned into a Fascist Empire”; Traynor; Viktor Vasiliyev; Yaffa; Zubov.
² Jones; Laqueur, The Black Hundred; Mitchell.
4.1 The Reciprocity of Russian Neo-Fascism and the Russian Idea

The question of what counts as fascism has been widely discussed and resolved in a number of ways. It is true that we are able to recognize modern versions of fascism in the images of a crowd with arms stretched out in a salute or carrying banners with swastikas. Yet the issue of defining fascism in modern Russia, especially considering the popular memory of the country’s anti-fascist struggle, is more than an issue of fascist aesthetics or, for that matter, a mere borrowing of fascist ideas that cropped up in Western Europe in the twentieth century.

Most often fascism is characterized as an extreme ethnic or a broader cultural nationalist idea that is characteristically xenophobic and anti-Semitic, favors authoritarian and totalitarian forms of government, suppression of civil liberties, in a military chauvinistic fashion advocates for the unity of the nation beyond the borders of its original state, promotes the nation’s imperial and even global ambitions as the nation’s supposedly special historical destiny, and is reinforced by means of propaganda and conspiracy theories. These features, however, do not uniquely separate fascism from other forms of the extreme right. A key element of fascism, according to Roger Griffin, is its revolutionary aspect vocalized in the myth of national rebirth.

---

3 Allardyce argues that fascism cannot be used as a generic concept, since fascism did not exist beyond Italy. This definition, however, is extremely exclusive. In this dissertation, like other scholars who support a wider notion of fascism, I use this term more generally and do not refer only to the fascism of the interwar period. See Allardyce; Carter; Ebata; Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion”; Griffin, The Nature of Fascism; Griffin, “Staging the Nation’s Rebirth”; Griffin and Feldman; Kallis; Shenfield; Laqueur, Fascism; Lyons.

4 At the same time, the aesthetic component of historical fascism is not to be underestimated. As Gentile points out, fascism “expresses itself aesthetically, more than theoretically, through a new political style and through the myths, rituals and symbols of a lay religion created for the cultural socialisation and integration of the masses, toward faith in the creation of a ‘new man’.” Gentile, The Origins of Fascist Ideology 380. See also Gentile, Politics as Religion.

5 The term extreme right, which neo-fascism is a species of, can be defined in a number of ways. According to Cas Mudde, scholars have identified about fifty-eight different features of extreme right-wing ideology, which combined produce twenty-six different definitions. The most common way to define an extreme right movement or
As Shenfield insists, Griffin’s definition of fascism as “a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism,” however, fails to emphasize the premodern element of the national myth. For the former, fascism is rather “an authoritarian populist movement that seeks to preserve and restore premodern patriarchal values within a new order based on communities of nation, race, or faith.” This definition, however, does not differ dramatically from Griffin’s more elaborate explication of fascism as 

[an] essentially palingenetic, and hence anti-conservative, thrust toward a new type of society...that... builds rhetorically on the cultural achievements attributed to former, more ‘glorious’ or healthy eras in national history only to invoke the regenerative ethos which is a prerequisite for national rebirth, and not to suggest socio-political models to be duplicated in a literal-minded restoration of the past.

While placing emphasis on the reactionary and the revolutionary aspects respectively, Shenfield and Griffin both characterize fascism as an ideology that simultaneously struggles to preserve premodern, “authentic” values and to create a radically new society under modern conditions. Keeping in mind Lacan’s thesis that any attempt to recollect the past, let alone to reanimate it, necessarily involves its revision, “the literal-minded restoration of the past” then, one can conclude, always ends in a production of something new.

organization is to provide a maximum definition - the fullest collection of features - and a minimum definition - the smallest amount of core features that constitute extreme right-wing ideology. Whereas the minimum of required core features varies from scholar to scholar (some of them identify up to ten core elements), the most frequently used characteristics of extreme right-wing ideology include ethnic nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and the strong state. See Mudde, The Ideology of Extreme Right; Mudde, “Right-Wing Extremism.”

Griffin, The Nature of Fascism 26. In his attempts to underscore the anti-conservative, revolutionary character of fascism, Griffin insists – in a kind of coyly essentialist manner – that those who “[are] drawn to fascism for non-revolutionary motives” are conservative “fellow travelers rather than ‘true’ fascists.” Griffin, “Da Capo, Con Meno Brio” 264. For more on the anti-modernizing feature of fascism see Kitchen; Turner.

Shenfield 17.

Griffin, The Nature of Fascism 47.

Appealing both to tradition and modernity, fascism is often discussed in the terms such as “conservative revolution,” “reactionary modernism,” “revolutionary reaction.” See Griffin, Roger. The Nature of Fascism 47-48; Neocleous, Fascism; Neocleous, “Revolution?” For more on the debate about the conservative and revolutionary aspects of fascism see Griffin, Loh, and Umland.
It is not only from the above consideration that I argue against a clear-cut separation of Russian conservative ultranationalists as an arguably reactive force from undisguised neo-fascist revolutionaries (which, if supported, would dilute the gravity of the problem of radically tragic attitudes in Russia), and analyze psycho-rhetorical narratives of the Christian Orthodox and monarchist Russian Imperial Movement (RID) and two neo-fascist organizations – the Slavic Union (SS) and Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), as a consolidated national fantasy. A close reading of the rhetoric of the aforementioned groups points to a significant ideological convergence among them, as well as an idiosyncratic character of Russian neo-fascism. Similar to Russian neo-fascists who swear their “[fidelity] to the Blood and the Land, for [their] Race is in [their] Blood, and the ashes of [their] Ancestors are in [their] Land,” the formally imperialist and monarchist RID proclaims the Russians as a superior race, more specifically, a remarkably “spiritual,” or “divine” race.10

A fragile contraposition of tradition and modernity, reaction and revolution, for example, lies behind Andreas Umland’s observation that unlike traditional ultraconservatists (one of whom is arguably Putin), Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who is dissatisfied with the old, i.e. tsarist and Soviet, imperial models, and thus pushes for a new, revolutionary kind of Russian empire (the one that includes Afghanistan, Turkey and Iran), can be qualified as fascist.11 Contra Umland, I assert that the expansionist views of the Impertsy are as radical as the views of Russian neo-fascists: they both promote a thesis of Lebensraum – an understanding that territories of empires must grow in order to provide “the state-forming peoples of those empires [with]…a [much needed] place under the sun.”12 In addition, one of the founding beliefs of Russian national-

---

11 See Ragozin, “Andreas Umland.” Others, however, are less reserved in pointing out Putin’s Eurasianist and even global agenda. See Coyer; Schindler.
12 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “The Essence of the Empire” n.pag.
monarchist national fantasy - the principle of “Russia is where Russians live” - is so unabashedly reminiscent of Nazi Germany’s aspirations to unite with Germans living outside of its borders, that is reveals modern Russia’s rather bellicose intentions to expand quite possibly beyond the bounds of Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.¹³

Russian neo-fascists – be they the self-proclaimed national-socialist SS, the self-described national-democratic DPNI, as well as the formally national-imperialist/national-monarchist RID, all promote a vision of a new Russian state where an elevated status of ethnic Russians (including Ukrainians and Belarusians who are purportedly ethnically Russian), compared to other non-ethnically-Russian citizens of the country, is guaranteed by the Constitution. In addition, the SS, for example, calls to “lawfully” limit liberties and freedoms of “inferior races,” or non-ethnic Russians, to deport illegal labor immigrants, to deprive such federal subjects as republics of their national status and excessive funding from the federal budget, to conduct forced Russification, and to limit movement of some non-Russian ethnic groups outside their respective republics.¹⁴ Although somewhat reminiscent of the Nazi policy toward the Jews and other ethnic groups considered Untermenschen, which eventually culminated in Hitler’s plans to exterminate and enslave “inferior” people, Russian neo-fascist national fantasy, as I demonstrate in more detail later, is not that of the Nazi kind, but possesses a distinct Russian character.¹⁵

To explain the Russian specificity of neo-fascism it is important to take into account the fact that Russians have been shaped by the memory of the Great Patriotic War and the continued experience of living in a multinational state. This is not to say, however, that Russians are somehow immune from tragic national fantasies. On the contrary, increasingly tragic images of

---

¹³ See Pykhtin n. pag.
¹⁴ “The Oath” n.pag. See also “Belov”; “Frequently Asked Questions”; Sablin.
¹⁵ On the Nazi national policies, see Browning.
the nation capture the eye of more and more Russians. Thus, for instance, according to the 2015 Levada polls, 39 percent of Russian citizens expressed their approval for Stalin’s leadership, while about 30 percent remain indifferent to the figure of the Soviet dictator. As Roman Dobrokhotov, a leader of the Russian youth democratic movement My (“We”) asserts, “Russians lack the genetic memory that Europeans and people of former Soviet republics as those who [fought totalitarian regimes] have”: Russians never took a truly comic stance and fought the totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany or the USSR as just another national enemy.\(^{16}\) Although generations of Russians have been brought up within the anti-fascist and multinational narrative, it left them with nothing more than a mere argument that is now used superficially to defend the supposed moral superiority and spiritual strength of the Russian nation. The lesson of the country’s fight with fascism, sadly, did not inspire Russians to adopt a habit of treating representatives of other cultures and ethnicities with genuine respect.

The rhetoric of Russian neo-fascists may not be flagrantly hateful also due to the Kremlin’s increasing pressure on anybody critical of Putin’s regime.\(^{17}\) While in the late 1990s to mid-2000s Dmitry Demushkin, the SS leader, spoke from a position of a neo-fascist, openly drawing on the German theory of National Socialism (which, as he notes, “did not belong to Germans, but the whole white mankind”), by 2015 he unequivocally defined himself as a moderate or “traditional nationalist.”\(^{18}\) As Demushkin further explains:

It is important to understand that in 1999, when the Slavic Union was created, the political situation was completely different. There was no Article 282, there were

\(^{16}\) “Stalinization of Russia” n.pag.
\(^{17}\) Since neo-fascists or any other real or supposed extremists cannot be directly brought up on charges for their anti-Putin position, they are usually prosecuted for hate crimes in accordance with Article 282 “Incitement of National, Racial, or Religious Enmity.”
\(^{18}\) “Frequently Asked Questions” n.pag.
lots of [neo-Nazis] in the organization, but now they do not exist at all [in Russia].

The situation changed, and nationalism evolved too.19 What transformed, however, is not the sweepingly tragic national vision held by Russian neo-fascists, but the way the national fantasy is negotiated when exposed to close attention from the state, which attempts to keep radically neo-fascist expressions at bay (especially considering Russia’s vocal accusations of Estonia and Ukraine as exemplars of state fascism).20 In other words, Russian neo-fascists had to learn to relay their ideas dubiously and guardedly.

It is also necessary to acknowledge the unprecedented scale and speed of globalization processes, which strongly affect how the idea of the Russian nation is being negotiated. From this angle, it is not totally surprising that Russian neo-fascists consider the efforts of, for example, the Jews of Israel to build and sustain their nation-state exemplary: “best representatives of the Jewish nation heroically fight in the next Golan Heights, standing up for their right to exist, and little by little reclaim land from the desert cultivating it.”21 Even more so, for Russian neo-fascists, Israel “is the outpost of the European civilization [‘the Civilization of the White Race’] in the Middle East….a civilization that is sick, weak, in need of a cure, but our civilization!”22 If not for such a spirit of nationalism, Russian neo-fascists warn, Europe would be overrun by people that “aggressively spread completely different and even opposite values.”23 All the above and other factors at a greater or lesser degree have contributed to the sound of the neo-fascist national voice with a distinctively Russian accent.

19 Azar, “We Will Become” n.pag.
20 See “Estonia Keeps Anti-Fascists Away from SS Veterans’ Meeting”; “Estonia: Nazi Safe Haven”; “Moscow Outraged by Estonia’s ‘Glorification of Fascists’”; “Result of Maidan”; “Ukrainian Neo-Nazis Switch from Theory to Practice”;
21 Demushkin n.pag.
22 Demushkin n.pag.
23 Demushkin n.pag.
The budding fascist-like tendencies in modern Russia are more than simply a disturbing inheritance of the interwar fascist regimes in Europe. While Russian conservatism (historically represented, for example, by the semi-fascist state-sponsored Black Hundred active at the beginning of the twentieth century in tsarist Russia) and fascism in Europe share the same anti-Enlightenment sentiments (e.g., suspicion of liberal individualism, rationalism, and materialism), the tradition of extreme Russian nationalism and later neo-fascism has its roots in the Russian idea, discussed in the previous chapter as a persistent preference for autocracy, Russian Orthodoxy, military chauvinism, xenophobia and racism at almost any particular moment in history. It is not surprising then that contemporary Russian neo-fascists support Mikhail Grott, a prominent ideologue of Russian émigré fascism of the first half of the twentieth century, in arguing that Russian fascism is a continuation of Russian History:

Russian History, the whole national way of life of the Russian people, its reach and peculiar historical and state traditions, its ecclesiastic-religious way, special way, profoundly devoted and self-sacrificing, - all these features have composed a powerful ideological foundation for the Russian Fascist Movement, and thus there has not been any need to borrow and imitate.

The long tragic tradition of Russian national identity negotiation, especially as it was shaped around Christian Orthodoxy, thus provides fascist ideologues with an opportunity to define the nation in fatalist, messianic or, as I explain more below, apocalyptic terms, and to defend a supposedly authentic Russian way of seeing the national self and the national other.

---

24 Although fascist ideology did not directly influence Russian conservative thought, it has certainly become a source of ideological and aesthetic inspiration for right-wing organizations in the country. See Ebata; Laqueur, Fascism.

25 Grott n. pag.
The emphasis on the arguably native “fascist ideas and attitudes, which are religiously significant, historically meaningful and politically necessary for the New Russia,” also allows Russian neo-fascists to disassociate themselves from painful memories of the Nazi invasion in the USSR, which begot in Russians a somewhat automatic, yet admittedly superficial, aversion to anything or anybody referred to as fascist.26 Fighting to preserve the purity of the white race and the Russian nation, neo-fascists – contemporary supporters of the ideas of ethnic and religious exclusivity and superiority of the Russians – refuse to be branded as “fascists” and consider all such accusations to be a provocation on the part of their perceived enemies.27 Moreover, distancing themselves from German fascism, Russian neo-fascists occasionally manage to capitalize on the Russian memory of the Great Patriotic War and paradoxically portray themselves as anti-fascists. For instance, as Russia had been preparing to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War, the International Russian Conservative Forum was held in St. Petersburg.28 Although the forum gathered many European and Russian ultranationalists, including neo-Nazis, Hitler apologists and Holocaust deniers, some of them referred to forum participants as “anti-fascist” and “Russia’s friends who support Putin.”29 In light of the Soviet Union’s fight with Nazi Germany and modern Russia’s opposition

26 Grott n. pag.
27 Among those few who explicitly characterize themselves as fascists are Eduard Limonov, the leader of the National Bolshevik Party, Maksim Kalashnikov, the blogger and political activist, and Maksim Martsinkevich, aka Tesak, a former skinhead and the leader of the far right group Format 18. See Limonov; Ponomarev; Shusharin.
28 On the International Russian Conservative Forum, see Azar, “Europe’s Far Right”; Cullison; Packer; Ragozin, “Is Russia Against Fascism”; Shekhovtsov, “What Does the Fascist Conference.” Also see the forum’s official website at <http://realpatriot.ru>.
29 Shekhovtsov, “What Does the Fascist Conference” n. pag.; “We Gathered not Fascist” n. pag. For example, while at the forum, Alexei Zhuravlev, the deputy of the Russian State Duma, head of the Rodina party and a member of the pro-Putin United Russia parliamentary group posted on Twitter his photograph with Udo Voigt, a high-ranking member of the right-wing National Democratic Party of Germany, with a caption: “Udo Voigt is also an antifascist!” (Shortly, however, Zhuravlev deleted the tweet). Another Rodina member, Fedor Biryukov praised the forum as “the first stone laid in the foundation of the new world order we are destined to build. St. Petersburg is becoming the city of a new revolution – a revolution of national interest against the conspiracy of the world’s 100 wealthiest families, who have turned the planet into their own plantation.” Biryukov also referred to foreign forum participants as “people of good will” and “not fascists, but friends of Russia who support Putin” and called on them
to the West, anti-fascism is conceived as an intrinsic feature of Russian patriotism. As the perceived threat to Russia had been steadily growing during Putin’s presidency, Russians once again saw themselves in a battle with malevolent forces, which allowed anyone who supposedly fights to defend the country’s interests at home and abroad (but only as they are formulated by the Kremlin) is to be considered a Russian patriot and thus an anti-fascist.\(^{30}\) Apparently, the word “fascism” has become an unspeakable term, while fascist-like behaviors, as we shall see in this and following chapter, under various names, including “anti-fascism,” unashamedly proliferate.

As explicated above, neo-fascism can be viewed as both a conservative or (reactionary and restorative) and revolutionary force, as an aspiration “to create a completely new order which, despite all its newness, is rooted in the fundamental force of the past.”\(^{31}\) As such, the fascist idea is nothing other than an apocalyptic myth of national tragedy.\(^{32}\) While the invocation of the ideas of national decadence and national rejuvenation in fascist narratives sounds quite nostalgic, an apocalyptic account of fascism does not create a backward-looking, romanticized image of the nation, but rather draws an image of a renewed nation – a nation that is both free of enemies and thus able to be rebuilt on “eternal” values into something new.

An apocalyptic quality of the fascist myth also emphasizes the dramatic, tragic opposition between the national subject as good and the national other as evil, which begins at the moment

---

\(^{30}\) In modern Russia the worlds “patriot,” “Putin’s supporter” and “anti-fascist” are often used interchangeably by the majority of Russians, as well as neo-fascists that support the politics of the Kremlin. Russian neo-fascists that are critical of the state, however, rarely resort to calling themselves “anti-fascist,” since the dominant “anti-fascist” discourse has become a sole prerogative of the Kremlin. As I note further in this chapter, the Russian neo-fascist camp has always included Putin’s opponents and supporters, who, however, started to rapidly drift apart with the beginning of Russia’s active interference in the internal politics of Ukraine in 2014.

\(^{31}\) “Volunteering” n. pag.

\(^{32}\) In the national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists, the generally apocalyptic narrative is founded on a number of conspiracy arguments.
the latter infringes on the well-being of the former. This must only result in the victory of the former and the eradication of everything incompatible with or corrupting the national character. In addition to tragedy proper, tragically inspired elegy and epic also contain the qualities of an apocalyptic myth. Russia, for instance, has traditionally viewed itself as being on a mission to fight its enemies and so to revive the “true” Russian spirit and follow the higher purpose of the Russian nation. Such tasks are given an eschatological meaning: a failure to fulfill the nation’s destiny necessarily leads to its demise. Only by redemption through a tragic rage, epitomized in the Russian paranoid hate for the national other, can the Russian nation and even the whole world be purportedly saved.

It is noteworthy that Russian neo-fascists’ embrace of both tradition and modernity in a way reflects the long-standing ambiguity of Russia’s vision of itself as a part of the Eastern or Western civilization, which I briefly mentioned in Chapter Three. Such an intersection of history and geography in the national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists echoes Lacan’s argument that historical development is not a straightforward unfolding of a continuous narrative in time, but is a matter of constant repunctuation of metonymically organized signifying chains. As I demonstrate in this chapter, negotiation of national identity by Russian neo-fascists is precisely a symbolic rearrangement of Russia’s position vis-à-vis the West and the East, which in appearance is understood as a search of Russia’s “essence” in time.

For the DPNI, for example, Russian extreme nationalism, similar to modern European ultranationalism, is nothing other than “a [response] of postindustrial society to the invasion of archaic elements,” such as the flow of labor immigrants from the former Soviet republics in the North Caucasus and Central Asia: “There is hardly anyone who wants his cozy neighborhood in Moscow to turn into a mountain village where strange dark-skinned people will be yelling

---

33 See also Shlapentokh, *Russia between East and West.*
gutturally back and forth in a foreign language." As Russian neo-fascists express their racist and xenophobic contempt for the supposedly uncivilized, primitive life of peoples to the East, they seek to conceive of Russia as a part of Western civilization. Russia’s identification with the West, however, has to be understood solely in terms of economic development, scientific progress and technological modernization, rather than proliferation of liberal democratic values and practices. Propping up Russia’s status of a major nuclear and space power, economic and technological advances, as Russian neo-fascists stress, is able to “[mobilize] national sentiment” and “[save the country] from total fragmentation, from absolute enslavement.”

At the same time, the SS and the RID insist that only by relying on Russian tradition, “[the] religious, spiritual and….mystical” vision of Russia, can it become “a counterbalance to the modern rational-material world order of progress” and thus “[preserve] the spirit, uniqueness, mentality and culture of the nation.” While seeking to match the West in economic and technological spheres, Russia (both in the psycho-rhetorical narrative of Russian neo-fascists and the philosophical tradition of Slavophilism with which the former is often consonant) nevertheless opposes the “materialism” of the West that arguably declares profit its supreme value. In doing so, Russia does not derive inspiration from the predominantly Muslim culture and the tribal past of its neighbors to the East, but from its historic and religious closeness with the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire. As I already pointed out in Chapter Three, it is in the long-lived opposition between the Latin West and the Greek East that Russia found its mission to bring “the morally disturbed Europe, this race of degenerates” “to a new and more (morally and intellectually) lofty civilization” with Christian Orthodoxy and traditional Russian ways at its

34 Benediktov “The Nation’s Ghost” n.pag.
35 Yeliseyev, “Stalin” n. pag.
36 “Mystic National Socialism” n. pag. See also Yeliseyev, “Stalin.”
core.\textsuperscript{37} As Russian neo-fascists see Russia clashing with the “soulless” and “blasphemous” West, the messianic idea of Moscow as the Third Rome also challenges the Muslim East as a historic enemy of Christianity and all of “white Aryan Christian Europe.”\textsuperscript{38}

Having discerned the sinister omen in the arguably decaying morals of an “insensitive, thoughtless and spineless” Europe and the “waves of Muslim migrants, [who] like the apocalyptic locust invade Europe,” Russian neo-fascists warn that Russia as “the post-Byzantine geopolitical leader of the Orthodox world” is on the brink of “the Great and Last religious-racial mystic war.”\textsuperscript{39} The Russian nation has arguably been caught between the two equally threatening forces: European blasphemy and Islamic fanaticism. On the one hand, there is “the Christ fighting Judeo-Masonic” world government, which “for a long time already [has] been governing [Europe] behind the curtain” and attempts to “establish the New World Order, or ‘Democratic Civilization,’ …the Kingdom of the Antichrist.”\textsuperscript{40} On the other, “the expansion of [Muslim] barbarians [into Europe]” can only end with the creation of “the New World Muslim Caliphate.”\textsuperscript{41} The course of globalization, which promotes “the Judeo-Masonic ideology of racial Anglo-Saxon superiority,” and Islamization as a process of “[bringing] everybody into ‘submission to Allah’” and installing a “Sharia-based sense of justice,” arguably strips the world of its humanity, perverts or negates the idea of faith and freedom, and destroy nation-states.\textsuperscript{42}

Only the “imperial future of Russia as the Middle Eurasian state” founded on the tradition of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{37} Sevast’yanov n. pag.; Mamleev, “Russia” 3, qtd. in Marsh 511. See also Mamleev, \textit{Russia Eternal}.
\bibitem{38} Turik n. pag.; Simonovich-Nikshich n. pag. As noted in Chapter Three, Russia claims the spiritual legacy of Constantinople, or “Second Rome,” which fell to the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century: “No other Christian Orthodox nation, but the Russians, saw itself as this rightful heir; nobody, but the Russians, dared to proclaim their capital ‘Third Rome’…; nobody, but the Russians,…during the First World War set a major task to reerect the cross on St. Sofia in Constantinople.” (Before 1453 St. Sophia, or Hagia Sophia was a Christian cathedral; in 1453 it became a mosque and in 1935 it was turned into a museum). Akunov n. pag.
\bibitem{39} Turik n. pag.; Simonovich-Nikshich n. pag.; Smolin n. pag.
\bibitem{40} Turik n. pag.
\bibitem{41} Simonovich-Nikshich n. pag.
\bibitem{42} Turik n. pag.; Savvin, “The Challenge of Islamization” n.pag.
\end{thebibliography}
“Christian Orthodoxy as [its] geopolitical force” is capable of defending Europe from “the anarchy [spread by Western liberalism] and barbarism [of the Islamic world]” and to save the world “from any kind of unipolarity and dictatorship.”

4.2 Fascism, Pathology, Irrationality, and Ethics

As briefly mentioned above and in the next chapter, Russian neo-fascists, as well as the mainstream conservative Russian public, in other words, those who support an authoritarian regime founded on an aggressively manifested ethnic national idea, readily call themselves anti-fascists. Although this “anti-fascist” rhetoric of Russian neo-fascists, entwined with memories of the Soviet people’s actual fight with fascism, is in part fueled by immediately opportunistic, speculative motives to discredit political opponents, it owes greatly to conflicting beliefs and feelings that have been shaping the Russian idea for centuries. As explored in Chapter Three, most popular or privileged national visions have come about in the vacillation between seemingly incompatible experiences (as they have been throughout Russia’s history): an attitude of passive suffering and active sacrifice; an idea of Russia as a part of the West and the East; fascination with the Western economic, technological and cultural progress and a sense of deep hatred toward the West; an understanding of Russia as a nation-state and a multicultural, multiethnic, and multiconfessional empire. Perceived ideational inconsistency of the Russian idea prompted some scholars to discuss it in terms of “eschatological psychosis” and “schizoid mentality.”44 Escalating ethnic nationalist attitudes in contemporary Russia too encouraged many journalists and scholars to talk about Russia’s nationalist “paranoia” and racist “mass psychosis,”

---

43 Smolin n. pag.
44 Billington, The Icon and the Axe 139; Ragsdale 61,181.
and, furthermore, to draw parallels between Russian national visions in their historic and modern forms with fascism.\textsuperscript{45}

Possessing “the most counterposed contents,” fascism is indeed most often explained as a kind of pathology, manifested in a culmination of the irrational, or put in psychoanalytically inflected language, as a maddening irruption of the unconscious that is expressed in highly irrational, inexplicably evil and aggressive behavior.\textsuperscript{46} In other words, in line with Freud’s opposition of aggressive human nature with cultured human culture, pathological, irrational and unconscious are used as synonyms used to describe fascism.\textsuperscript{47} Others, on the contrary, believe that fascism is what it is due to the cold and calculated logic foundational of its ideology and practices. In this chapter I take a moment to argue that from a Lacanian point of view ideological articulation of national identity cannot be discussed in terms of (ir)rationality and pathology, including psychosis and perversion (as it is often the case both in scholarly and popular debates on the nature of fascism), but should be viewed as a matter of ethics, with fascist ideology being an instance of tragic national fantasy. In other words, the arguably irrational and pathological nature of fascism or, on the contrary, the supposed mathematic-like logic of fascism, cannot exclusively define fascist attitudes.

Fascist fantasy embraces both the irrational and the rational. As I demonstrate in this chapter, Russian neo-fascists call for “pragmatic militarism and thoughtful patriotism”; their judgments are arguably not irrational and their actions do not supposedly stem from blind xenophobia and “narrow-minded revenge,” while at the same time emotions and irrationality, as

\textsuperscript{45} Service, n. pag.; Shunkhuttaren, n. pag. On growing ethnic nationalist tendencies in contemporary Russia, see Adamanis; Ponasenkov; Shekhovtsov, “What Does the Fascist Conference”; Umland, “Russia’s Creeping Fascism”; Umland, Russian Nationalism; Verkhovskiy; Verlin; Zarakhovich, “In Russia”; Zarakhovich, “Inside Russia’s Racism Problem.”

\textsuperscript{46} Ortega y Gasset in Laclau, “Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory” 81. Inconsistency of both the Russian idea and historical fascism alone does not warrant the likeness of the two phenomena.

\textsuperscript{47} Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents; Freud, The Future of an Illusion; Freud, The Resistances to Psycho-Analysis.
Russian neo-fascists insist, comprise the core of ethnic mythology and, surprisingly, prove that the national subject has a sensible appreciation of its national essence. Such curious inconsistency does not point to madness (which actually can be employed rationally and strategically) or cynicism of fascism as an ideology, but reveals the overall tragic grotesque incongruity of fascist fantasy, in part associated with the conspiratorial character of its narrative. As I already noted in Chapter Two, conspiracy is only a seemingly coherent, yet logically and factually questionable, narrative that nevertheless is intensely appealing to a non-critical audience.

One may argue that neo-fascist national fantasy as a radically conspiratorial narrative is not pathological, because “‘political’ paranoia [is not] an easily identified and pathologized ailment”:

by uncritically labeling certain claims “paranoid” and dangerous to society (in general), such theories miss the most important meaning of conspiracy theory: that it develops from the refusal to accept someone else’s definition of a universal social good or an officially sanctioned truth. This is not to say that we must open our arms to all manner of conspiracy theories. It is merely to assert that diagnoses of political paranoia are themselves political statements reflecting particular interests. Until we discover some magically unmediated access to reality, conspiracy theory cannot simply be pathologized in one sweeping gesture. While true, this argument emphasizes the ethical and political consequences of labeling conspiratorial and by extension fascist narratives as pathological. Alternatively, an explanation

---

49 Melley 13-14.
of fascism through the prism of Lacan’s psychoanalysis focuses on the question why fascist national fantasy cannot, rather than should not, be viewed as pathological.\textsuperscript{50}

Taking into consideration the fact that a large number of scholars and journalists regard fascist and neo-fascist tendencies as manifestations of mental illness, such as psychosis and perversion, and therefore alarming, it is important to explain how – on the most fundamental, structural level – fascist narratives interpellate people susceptible to conspiratorial arguments, rather than, for example, clinical psychotics or perverts.\textsuperscript{51} Moreover, a Lacanian account of the fascist national subject, which is structured as the neurotic, provides the critic with analytical tools – the Four Discourses – needed to resolve the apparent grotesque inconsistency of a fascist narrative.

In Lacan’s psychoanalysis, neurosis (and its four permutations or discursive practices), perversion (including fetishism, sadism and masochism) and psychosis (including paranoia, schizophrenia and manic depression) are distinct affective mechanism of dealing with lack or division inherent to subjectivity. While neurosis is considered to be a normal way of organizing the sense of the self and others around lack, perversion and psychosis are viewed as pathological structures of the psyche. As explained in the previous chapter, the subject is precluded from the enjoyment, or \textit{jouissance}, of the united self, that is, from the Absolute Being or the Thing, by virtue of being a speaking subject. By passing through “the double stage of alienation and separation,” the neurotic is able to sublimate \textit{jouissance} with desire, sustained in relation to the objet a in fantasy: “desire is merely a vain detour with the aim of catching the \textit{jouissance} of the

\textsuperscript{50} From a Lacanian point of view the argument against the possibility to regard fascist fantasy as pathological always involves an ethical aspect. A fascist narrative cannot be seen in terms of perversion or psychosis, but it can be evaluated on the scale between tragic mourning and comic melancholy. As such, it is always a matter of ethics.

\textsuperscript{51} For both Lacan and Burke, rationalization is not an objective narrative, which is impossible, but a narrative that contains partisan motives, or specific symptoms.
other.”\textsuperscript{52} The psychotic fails to go through the phase of symbolic alienation as he/she does not incorporate the signifier of the Other, or the Name-of-the-Father, while the pervert gets represented and thus alienated in language, but yet he/she does not advance further. Only by passing through the stage of separation successfully, that is, by paradoxically becoming subjected to recognition by another speaking being, the subject is able to secure a relatively autonomous subjective position for him/herself. Below, I explicate the peculiarity of subjectivization in psychosis and perversion in order to demonstrate that collective identity cannot be discussed in terms of pathology (which is understood in a strictly Lacanian sense).

In contrast to the neurotic subject who complies with the alienating “No!” of the Father, the knowledge of which is, however, pushed into the unconscious, in psychosis the law that is laid down by the fundamental signifier, or the impossibility of the absolute \textit{jouissance}, is “[rejected] into the outer shadows” of the subject’s psyche.\textsuperscript{53} As an effect of “a primordial process of exclusion of an original within, which is not a bodily within but that of an initial body of signifiers,” the psychotic subject suffers the ambiguity and even disintegration of his/her relationship with the self and others.\textsuperscript{54} As Lacan succinctly describes the problem with the psychotic, “the ego in its function of relating to the external world…breaks down.”\textsuperscript{55} With the fundamental signifier missing, the psychotic struggles to find his/her place in the Other as a symbolic network of social connections with many particular others. Instead, the psychotic’s identity is given its form by the Imaginary, in the rivalrous and paranoid relationship with the other within the self - “this imaginary other, this strange god who understands nothing,…who

\textsuperscript{53} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 150.
\textsuperscript{54} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 150.
\textsuperscript{55} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 144.
deceives the subject.”\textsuperscript{56} The psychotic’s inability to subdue this overwhelming libidinal force in a safe and productive, that is, Symbolic, manner results in the invasion of \textit{jouissance} in the form of hallucinations and delusions.\textsuperscript{57} In short, the psychotic does not stand a chance to get engaged by socially reproduced meanings since for him they do not cohere in any sort of congruent network, while messages that the psychotic receives in the form of hallucinations and delusions are always considered by him as obviously meaningful and strictly personal.

Just as with the psychotic, the function of the pervert’s Symbolic is impaired (albeit in a different fashion), which speaks to the pervert’s inability to participate in a “proper” ideological construction of the self. The pervert acknowledges castration, but immediately disavows it: he/she simultaneously cedes his/her raw \textit{jouissance} as a culmination of uninhibited enjoyment of oneness and refuses to accept in return anything less - the symbolically managed “will to \textit{jouissance},” which sprouts from lack and leaves the neurotic subject to answer to the question of his/her being over and over again, by affectively investing in a continuous stream of part-objects, the value of which is contingent on the Other’s desire (that is, on what particular others are assumed to long for, but can never have since the human being is ridden with lack).\textsuperscript{58} To put it otherwise, the pervert neither allows the absolute \textit{jouissance} to overrun him/herself, which is the case with the psychotic, nor succumbs to desire as a restricted, but safe way to enjoy oneself, which is the neurotic’s tactic. Instead, the pervert attempts to get the raw \textit{jouissance} bound to a particular sensory experience without supposedly sacrificing the absolute enjoyment in the

\textsuperscript{56} Lacan, Seminar, Book III 162.
\textsuperscript{58} Lacan’s explication of subjectivity production is based on the contrast between \textit{jouissance} and desire as the will to \textit{jouissance}. While \textit{jouissance} is the experience of extreme enjoyment that is often more painful and intolerable, rather than pleasurable, desire is a movement toward or anticipation of \textit{jouissance}, which always falls short of its goal and thus escapes its own extinction.
slightest, thus “creating an alternative…order in which jouissance holds pride of place.” The aspiration for “the right to jouissance” is, however, futile, since it goes again the principle of castration, according to which “jouissance is forbidden [interdite] to whoever speaks.” Said differently, faced with the forced choice between the freedom of jouissance and life as a meaningful subject, the pervert necessarily embraces the latter, but thinks of him/herself as “the brute subject of pleasure,” as that who supposedly has access to the most enjoyment. Unlike the psychotic and similar to the neurotic, the pervert’s affective economy as such is thoroughly fantasmatic, where “the order of fantasy…props up the utopia of desire” to be complete.

Although the neurotic’s and the pervert’s fantasies are both attempts at mastery of themselves, the pervert’s fantasy operates in a fairly distinct fashion. Perversion, as Lacan argues, is “an inverted effect of the phantasy” of the neurotic, expressed in the formula a◊$.

Rather than being the split, alienated subject that attempts to fill in the constitutive void with an objet a, which is seen as the property of the subject’s counterpart, the pervert is “reconstituted through alienation at the cost of being nothing but the instrument of jouissance,” that is, by positioning him/herself as an object in which of the jouissance of the Other is petrified, or becoming the idol, “the black fetish, [wherein]…[the pervert’s partner or victim] can adore the god.”

As Lacan explains, the pervert sustains him/herself an imaginary relationship to his/her counterpart, whose image functions as a reflection of the pervert’s own lacking self. The pervert,

---

59 Nobus 44.  
62 Lacan, Écrits 653. As Lacan insists, “no matter how strange, how bizarre the phantasy of perverse desire may be in appearance, desire is always in some fashion involved in it. Involved in a relationship which is always linked to the pathetic, to the pain of existing as such, of purely existing, or of existing as a sexual term.” Lacan, Seminar, Book VI 218.  
however, disavows the division of subjectivity he/she encounters in the other and thus in him/herself by identifying “with the phallicized [or complete other]….It is properly speaking with the phallus [or fullness] that he [or she] identifies himself in so far as this phallus is hidden.”65 In other words, the pervert takes upon him/herself the role of the exclusive object of the particular other’s desire.

Normally the Other’s desire “confronts [the subject] with this sort of uncrossable barrier to the satisfaction of [his/her] own desire,” by becoming a question that the neurotic can never answer definitively due to a life-long relationship of constitutive – both differentially and affectively - dependence on another desiring, or lacking, subject. The pervert, however, shuns lack by aspiring to become everything that the former lacks to create the Other as an order that is complete unto itself, thus erasing any presence of otherness. As such the pervert’s fantasy cannot establish a properly ideological connection with the other: the pervert is never interpellated by the impervious question of the Other’s desire: “Che vuoi?”

Although achieving the uncompromised jouissance is the task the pervert believes he/she takes upon him/herself, it is not what he/she actually accomplishes: “what appears from the outside as satisfaction without restraint is defence, is well and truly the bringing into play, into action of a law in so far as it restrains, it suspends, it stops, precisely on the path of this jouissance.”66 The whole experience of the pervert is aimed at bringing the law of lack into effect, which is too manifested in treating the pervert’s victim or partner as puppet. The pervert humiliates the other, “seeks [to cause] the anxiety of the [other],” by revealing the other’s lack

---

and seizing control of the other’s desire, and so enacts the Law or prohibition of the absolute enjoyment imposed by the Symbolic.\textsuperscript{67}

To bring the preceding considerations of the self/other dialectic in neurosis, psychosis and perversion in relation the question of nationhood, it is easy to recognize that lack and otherness comprise the foundational mechanism of national identity negotiation.\textsuperscript{68} The national subject aspires to secure a complete idea of the national self as distinct from or even incompatible with the national other. In opposition to Carl Jung’s definition of fascism as “a mass psychosis which was bound to lead to crime,” even the most radically tragic national subject, I argue, does not possess the structure of the psychotic.\textsuperscript{69} A tragic national fantasy, buttressed by the images of profound otherness, culminates in an idea of a stable, well delineated national subject, and this is precisely what the psychotic is not. Instead, the psychotic loses him/herself in the ambiguity of his/her relationship with others and the self, as he/she is overrun by jouissance experienced as an onslaught of otherness from within. While a tragic national narrative may be thoroughly paranoid, suspicious of the other, it is still a normal (or neurotic), albeit politically dangerous and ethically questionable, make-up of a national fantasy: as discussed in Chapter Two, the ego, torn by aggressive and competitive impulses, has an essentially paranoid structure. The Russian neo-fascist fantasy, in particular, is far from being psychotic, as it is, as I demonstrate later, a purposeful employment of paranoid imagery within the dominant symbolic field of the Other: liberal democracy.

\textsuperscript{67} Lacan, Seminar, Book X 27.2.63 XII 137. It is ironic that the pervert as the one who positions himself beyond lack and desire in his very perverted fantasy becomes “a slave to pleasure,” a subject to the law of lack: “the fact that the [sadist’s] jouissance becomes fixated [in the instrument] does not spare his jouissance the humility of an act in which he cannot but become a being of flesh.” Lacan, Écrits 652.

\textsuperscript{68} The concepts of lack and otherness are related since the phenomenon of otherness owns its very existence to the experience of lack.

\textsuperscript{69} Jung 80.
The national subject is not built as the pervert either. Contra this claim, Žižek and Juliet Flower MacCannell, however, discern the perverse nature of fascism in the obscene, non-utilitarian value of unquestionable obedience, “an act of formal sacrifice,” a sacrifice without any instrumental purpose, demanded from the masses: fascism after all “perceives directly the ideological form as its own end, as an end in itself.”

By renouncing any personal gain obtained from his/her murderous actions and repudiating any ideological reasoning, any meaning behind incomprehensible violence, the fascist national subject, as the scholars argue, becomes the very instrument of the jouissance of the Führer. Said otherwise, following the tautological maxim “one must obey because one must,” the ordinary fascist as a Lacanian pervert sacrifices his/her will to the will of the Other, or rather to the Other’s will to jouissance.

The accent on the formal nature of sacrifice demanded by fascism, “the [pure] spirit of sacrifice,” coincides with Walter Benjamin’s theoreticization of fascism as the aestheticization of politics. As Benjamin argues, with modern technological advancement, in particular, in reproducing the work of art, the latter lost its mythical quality that it possessed earlier. The destruction of aura in its turn created plentiful opportunities for the public to actively engage with art, to employ art for political purposes. Fascism, according to Benjamin, did the very opposite: it aestheticized politics by relieving the fascist from any considerations, save for the supposed organic harmony or authentic beauty of the imagined fascist nation. Fascist ideology,

---

70 Žižek, The Sublime Object 82. See also MacCannell, “Facing Fascism”; MacCannell, “Fascism and the Voice of Conscience.”

71 The perverse call to enjoy fully by giving him/herself to the will of the Other cannot be confused with Lacan’s ethical refusal to give up on desire. This is, however, precisely what Žižek does in The Parallax View as he hears “the unexpected echoes between [Lacan’s Ethics of Psychoanalysis] and the thought of Georges Bataille, the philosopher of the passion for the Real,” when he wonders whether “Lacan’s ethical maxim ‘do not compromise your desire’ . . . is a version of Bataille’s injunction ‘to think everything to a point that makes people tremble.’ ” Žižek, The Parallax View 94.

72 Žižek, The Sublime Object 82.
in Benjamin’s words, was meant to become an experience of “an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.”

Another representative of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno, explains the phenomenon of fascism in a similar fashion. As humanity evolved, Adorno notes, rational thinking allowed people to conquer and understand nature, which contributed to the demystification of the world around them. The ideology of fascism, however, became a moment of perversion of reason, which gave way to mythological thinking. More precisely, within the tradition of the Frankfurt School the irrationality of fascism is viewed neither as a negation of rationality nor a lapse into pre-modern savagery, but rather as “the ultimate ironic fact that an excess of rationality as so defined adds up to a new level of irrationality.”

Julia Kristeva too sees the perverse quality in fascism. Commenting on the works of French novelist and fascist ideologue Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Kristeva argues that fascism presents an instance of the discourse of abjection, which is “perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them.” In her psychoanalytic theory of subjectivity, the abject is the otherness within, “[a] massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness,” which “simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject,” disturbs order and meaning; and abjection is a process of expelling of “the impossible within.” Fascism as a form of abjection

---

73 Benjamin 242.
74 Burke, On Human Nature 78. According to Seymour Martin Lipset, fascism presents an irrational anti-liberal system of views. Similarly, Talcott Parsons saw fascism as an irrational “‘fundamentalist’ revolt” of “the extremely deep-seated romantic [ideas]” against the sweeping rationalization of Western society. Parsons 123. Also see Lipset; Brown; Treviño.
75 Kristeva also speaks of fascism and anti-Semitism in terms of psychosis – “the avowed delirium,” and as a “parareligious formation.” Kristeva 177, 180. See also my discussion of Emilio Gentile’s thesis of the sacralization of politics below.
76 Kristeva 15.
77 Kristeva 5, 2, 4. Theorized as such, Kristeva’s notion of perversion approximates Lacan’s concept of the Real, rather than being one of the three subjective ways to grapple with the Real. As Antonios Vadolas pinpoints, to
then extols an idea of the nation that is “capable of being full, without other, without threat, without heterogeneity” when “differences [are absorbed] into a kind of sameness.” Kristeva sees fascism as a longing for the pre-Symbolic, “spontaneous, innate, animal beauty” of the nation, which is beyond politics and presents the end in itself, and as “a rage against the Symbolic,” the society that is regulated by the paternal law (castration) and its “reason that constrains and maims.”

Speaking about fascism as a triumph of corrupted rationality, Bauman argues that the culture of the “[f]ormal and ethically blind…bureaucratic pursuit of efficiency“ created its conditions of possibility. Bauman insists that the mathematical-like logic of fascist ideology, as well as the precision, unambiguity and discipline that come with it, was essential for the organizational achievements of fascism, and “[h]aving reduced human life to the calculus of self-preservation, this rationality robbed human life of humanity.” Just like Žižek and MacCannell, Bauman acknowledges an ultimate emptiness of fascist ideology expressed in unquestionable obedience to the Führer and he believes that it is not ideological zealotry that becomes the propelling force of fascism, since “[it] is safer, and above all much more efficient, to put emotions aside.”

---

78 Kristeva 179.
79 Kristeva 178, 179.
80 Kristeva 177, 178.
81 Bauman 15.
82 Bauman 203.
83 Bauman 246.
Bauman, however, agrees with Arendt in that fascists “were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal.” While Arendt is adamant about “the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil,” Bauman insists on its rationality. In a complementary way to Arendt’s emphasis on the lack of critical thought behind “the intricate bureaucratic setup of the Nazi machinery of destruction,” Bauman concludes that:

[it] was the designing of the ‘solution to the Jewish problem’ as a rational, bureaucratic-technical task, as something to be done to a particular category of objects by a particular set of experts and specialized organizations – in other words, as a depersonalized task not dependent on feelings and personal commitments – which proved to be, in the end, adequate to Hitler’s vision.

Bauman’s observations about the excessive rationality of German fascism are especially important in light of Russia’s accumulating appeals to the rationality of the country’s actions: they are made, as I show in this and the next chapter, by both Russian neo-fascists, the Kremlin and those loyal to the Kremlin.

Although distinct in emphasis from Benjamin’s thesis on fascism’s aestheticization of politics, Bauman’s explication similarly stresses that fascist ideology leaves no room for the political: fascism aestheticizes politics not only by arguably stripping it of an ideological content, but also by distancing it from any moral responsibility, by “neutralizing the impact of primeval moral drives.” Emilio Gentile arrives at a similar conclusion that fascism contributes to the withering of the political, although he takes an argumentative route that runs counter to the claims of those who present fascism to be ideologically and morally void. Gentile emphasizes

---

84 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 276. According to Kren and Rappoport, no more than 10 per cent of the Nazi SS could qualify as having a mental illness. Kren and Rappoport 70.
85 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 252.
86 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 211; Bauman 188-189.
87 Bauman 188.
the reliance of fascism on myth (more specifically, an apocalyptic religiously inspired national myth), or what he calls the sacralization of politics. In other words fascism promotes an unconditional and indisputable belief in the fascist nation, whose values supposedly serve as the “source of meaning and [define] the ultimate aim of human existence on earth.” As such, the process of national identity construction precludes an active negotiation of national fantasies and is limited to a passive parareligious engagement in mass spectacles that institutionalize national memory and discipline national sentiments from the point of view of an “authentic” national vision. In this sense Gentile’s sacralization of politics is consonant with the concept of aestheticization understood as an often tragic aspiration toward the purportedly original, auratic value of the nation. Similarly it is possible to talk about the aestheticization of national fantasy in Burke’s terms – as a movement toward perfection, toward the unquestionable “Truth and Beauty” of the nation.

Burke’s theory, and more specifically his “logic of perfection,” too is at variance with the argument that fascism is an obscene ideology of pure, formal sacrifice. Burke discusses Hitler’s rhetoric by emphasizing its reliance on myth and “a bastardization of fundamental religious patterns of thought,” which brings Burke’s understanding of fascism closer to that of Gentile, rather than Žižek or Bauman. Moreover, a large part of his scholarship draws on theology, which “serves as a [model] of verbal ‘grace’ that ‘perfects’ nature.” From the point of view of Burke’s logology, fascism can be addressed in terms of purificatory sacrifice, propelled by the guilt of imperfection that requires redemption. The juxtaposition of Burke’s fascist, whose national fantasy presents itself as “the purgative-redemptive ethical drama,” and Žižek’s fascist,

---

88 Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion” 34.
89 Grott n. pag.
90 Burke, Rhetoric of Religion 314.
91 Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form 219.
92 Burke, “Theology and Logology” 153.
whose national fantasy is ideologically void, allows recognizing a key distinction between the neurotic’s and the pervert’s fantasies.\(^9^3\) As neurotic, the Burkean national subject can explain its mode of *jouissance* in a multitude of particular, culturally shared linguistic motives. Thus, for example, the Russian neo-fascists’ call for sacrifice emerges from an idea of defensive action, the need to “rescue” the Russian nation from its supposedly imminent death at the hand of its supposed national enemies. Meanwhile, the perverse subject is animated by the sole injunction to enjoy its fullness.

It seems that Žižek argues that properly ideological, that is, particular or, speaking in Burke’s terms, linguistic motives are absent from the fantasy of the perverse subject, which makes the pervert’s unconscious dynamics of desire, that is, the Burkean psychological motive, readily available to the subject. This is the case neither in perversion, nor in fascist fantasy, which Žižek and others see as perverse. First, as I show below, according to Lacan, the pervert’s reality is thoroughly fantasmatic, that is, filled with particular, linguistic motives, although with a few variations. Second, speaking in terms of Laclau’s account of hegemonic identity, the ideological totality of fascism is too permeated with particular demands, the realization of which is threatened by perceived national enemies.

The explanation of fascism as pathology, more specifically, sadism as one of the forms of perversion, can be attributed in part to the interpretation of perversion in opposition to neurosis: while neurosis is often described as “our ability to repress our more destructive impulses and to sublimate them into socially productive activities,” perversion arguably subsumes everything primitive, impetuous, destructive and meaningless (both as impossible to symbolize, as it is the case in Kristeva’s theory of abjection, and formal or devoid of content, as it is emphasized in

\(^{93}\) Rueckert, *Kenneth Burke* 128.
Žižek’s explication of the obscene quality of fascist ideology). This opposition parallels the conflict between nature and culture prominent in Freud’s psychoanalysis, rather than the difference between perversion and neurosis in Lacan’s theory of subjectivity. Through the prism of Lacan’s psychoanalysis, neurosis cannot be equated with obedience to the law of the cultured society, while perversion cannot be solely explicated as the waning or the transgression of that law that leaves the pervert in the grip of uninhibited drives. Lacan insists that perversion “is not simply an aberration in relation to social criteria, an anomaly contrary to good morals, although this register is not absent….It is something else in its very structure.”

Just as with neurosis, perversion is a possible, albeit less common response to castration as the unattainability of the absolute jouissance, an attempt to subdue the destructive libidinal force by means of the Symbolic: “Perversion… is the privileged exploration of an existential possibility of human nature - its internal tearing apart, its gap, through which the supra-natural world of the symbolic was able to make its entry.” Similar to that of the neurotic, the pervert’s fantasy is a promise of fullness that can never be delivered. Perversion then is not the immediacy of jouissance, which was purportedly possible preceding the infliction of the symbolic law, but a promise thereof; it is not “the sensual version of a [supposedly] higher, more comprehensive notion of rationality,” but an appeal thereto.

The difference between the neurotic’s and pervert’s fantasies stems from their underlying structures, and that difference is crucial in explicating why the pervert cannot be considered a collective, ideologically bound subject. The pervert occupies a position of certainty and

---

94 Rothenberg, Foster, and Žižek 30.
95 While any given social code is a part of the Symbolic, it does not exhaust the field of the latter. The Symbolic, first and foremost, is associated with the law of the signifier, or the differential logic of signification.
96 Lacan, Seminar, Book I 221.
97 Lacan, Seminar, Book I 218
98 Jay 46.
knowledge by providing what he/she thinks is an answer to the question of the lacking other. This precludes him from establishing a symbolic, truly social bond with the other, since forming collective identities is a way of dealing with lack or otherness as it is experienced from within. Said differently, the pervert does not respond to an ideological hailing: he/she is supposedly not the one who wonders what the Other wants from him/her.

The structural idiosyncrasy of the pervert’s mode of jouissance is manifested in fantasy, which is not at all contradictory to that of the neurotic, but an alternative way to deal with lack, although for the pervert the only lacking subject is the desiring other and not himself/herself. The neurotic’s fantasy is more varied and flexible: the subject’s libidinal energy can be invested into a plenitude of symptomatic objects (in the case of national identity they are abstract ideas that have material manifestations), which are of value only by the sheer virtue of occupying the same place as the object of the other’s desire. In perversion the will to jouissance circles around the bodily images of the pervert and his/her victim or partner. Said differently, the neurotic’s fantasy is a shot at making sense of the Real by symbolic means, which highlights the neurotic’s attempt to resolve the second lack, that is, to domesticate the Real as the impossible. Meanwhile the pervert strives to experience the Real. The perverse fantasy then emphasizes the real lack, or the Real as the sensible, and such an affective economy can hardly become constitutive of an ideologically bound subject.

The pervert’s fantasy is an attempt to secure the mythical union with the other perceived as the pre-Oedipal completeness without otherness, which would entail the dissolution of the subject’s autonomy and subjectivity itself (in reality, as I mentioned above, the pervert’s fantasy, however, always leaves the pervert desiring and thus lacking). Although “[t]he dialectic of the unconscious always implies struggle, [or] the impossibility of coexistence with the other,” the
neurotic is, nevertheless, “constructed around a center which is the other.” In terms of the present discussion, to be able to see itself as a part of a nation, the national subject has to position itself in relation to the national other. It is from the latter that the national subject – in an inverted and unconscious fashion – receives the coordinates around which it can build its national image and gets recognized in that image. If the national other as the ultimate enemy is removed from the equation, which is ultimately the pervert’s fantasy, there is nobody left to negotiate national identity with. Even in the radically tragic national fantasy of fascism that rests on appeals for total extermination of the national other, the idea of otherness as a disconcerting gaze under which the national subject maintains itself nevertheless persists.

Just as national identity construction, as well as fascism as its most tragic form, cannot be discussed in terms of pathology, it is not a matter of (ir)rationality either, although in academic literature fascism is frequently described as a rational or irrational behavior, be it either a perverted indifference to the justification of one’s acts (as explicated by Žižek and MacCannell), a revolt against the rationality of the Symbolic (as discussed by Kristeva), an excess of rationality that leads to amoral, apolitical administrative pursuit of efficiency or a mythological thinking (as described by Bauman and Adorno respectively), a fervent aspiration toward a mythical idea of the organic wholeness, the ethereal beauty and the innate truth of the nation or race (as considered by Burke, Benjamin and Gentile respectively), and, finally, an uncritical, yet dispassionate, view of actions performed by oneself and others (as advocated by Arendt).

Moreover, for the general public the irrationality of fascism too has become the definitive feature of this ideology, which prompted Russian neo-fascists to insist on their rationality, as

---

100 The object a, gaze and the troubling question of the Other’s desire are all related concepts as they stem from the same place – the place of lack.
well as sanity (since in public opinion irrationality is often taken to be a sign of derangement). Russian neo-fascists do not purportedly fall prey to irrational conspiracy theories, but they are rather mindful of *realpolitik* and “concerned with social justice and the life of the Russian people here and now.” Russian neo-fascism, as they claim, no longer consists of “marginalized individuals or a bunch of madmen and old ladies marching in delirious carnivals,” but “a relatively effective and successful political force.” At the same time, however, Russian neo-fascists see it necessary to counterpoise what they consider to be the exceedingly calculated, rational behavior of the West.

Even more so, fascism is not an issue of mental health, as I already explained, as well as good sense and, for that matter, goodness in general, although categorical claims of neo-fascists to rationality, normalcy and virtue must not be left without attention since those characterizations, as well as fascist ideology on the whole, are ethically questionable. It is worth noting that the traditional concept of good stands apart from ethical implications of psychoanalysis: “Doing things in the name of the good, even more so in the name of the good of the other – there you have something that will give us no shelter from culpability, nor from all kinds of interior catastrophes.” Instead, from a Lacanian point of view, in order to not give up on desire, one must “[go] beyond not just fear [for one’s own good], but all pity [for the good of the other as a specular image of the self].”

Complemented with Burke’s concept of attitude, Lacan’s psychoanalysis, as I illustrate below, allows seeing a fascist idea of the nation as that which derives strength both from the

---

101 See Rucker.
102 Gumanova n. pag.
103 Gumanova n. pag.; “Basmanov” n. pag. Also see Basmanov, “Putinism.”
104 See “Mystic National Socialism.”
tragic content of its message and the formality of its appeal. Moreover, I argue that Lacan’s theory is able to provide sufficient explicatory rigor to resolve the grotesque incongruity—the simultaneous presence of the irrational and rational content—of fascist fantasy. The Master’s discourse, for example, demonstrates a radical disjunction between the body ($) and the name (S1), thus highlighting a tautological, or what Žižek refers to as perverse, nature of any ideological construct, including the fantasy of fascism: behind any ideology lies the collective subject’s desire to match its name. As the aura of completeness or the Real is forever lost for any speaking being, pure jouissance of the unity of oneself is experienced only fantasmatically. The Master’s discourse further emphasizes that the ultimate arbitrariness or lack in the center of ideology is concealed or accounted for by narratives that aim to explain the origins of and values attributed to an ideological commitment.

As the Discourse of the University shows, such narratives, whether they are based on an unconditional and pious belief, bureaucratic logic, or a formal injunction to obey power, constitute a system of knowledge (S2) that is promoted as objective, rational, universal or simply true.\(^\text{107}\) The structure of the Discourse of the University allows seeing why a fascist fantasy, which may be defined as formal, bureaucratic, uncritical, fanatical or cynical, is always nothing but an attempt at rationalization of the authority of the master signifier. Even behind the obscene and non-utilitarian nature of what Žižek sees as a purely formal and not properly ideological sacrifice lies an unquestionable belief in the will of the Master, a conviction that the Master equals its name.

Further, the Discourse of the Hysteric illustrates how the fascist national subject refuses to be named by the national other who arguably usurps the position of power unjustly and thus

\(^{107}\) To make claims to the truth of one’s national fantasy does not necessarily mean to argue that the latter is a rational and objective knowledge.
precludes the fascist from becoming the true self. At the level of the Hysteric’s Discourse the fascist fantasy often manifests itself as an elegy of apocalyptic magnitude – an unfairly uneven confrontation with a demonic and devious figure of the national other. As I demonstrate in the analysis of the fascist national fantasy in this chapter, Russian neo-fascists see world politics as more than a contest among nations in their physical, economic and technological might. In the Russian fascist fantasy, dominant nations are not necessarily spiritually superior and therefore their advantageous position is purportedly unjust and short-lived. As the bearer of “truth,” the fascist national subject is supposedly destined to dominate the national other qua the sham master and more so to become the absolute object of the national other’s desire. In other words, the fascist subject does not intend to annihilate national others completely, but to govern them.

Moreover, the Hysteric’s Discourse, in its obsessive variation, can explain the nature of the cynic’s participation in a grand fascist narrative or any other tragic idea. The cynic is the one who engages in ritualized practices, since he/she does not truly believe in the idea supported by those practices. This, as I argue, still amounts to a tragic attitude. Paradoxically, the fascist cynic’s affective organization does not differ much from that of the fascist fanatic: in their obsessive performance of the idea of racial supremacy, whether they believe in it or not, both the fanatic and the cynic attempt to defend themselves from the radical void within in a manner incompatible with the Lacanian-Burkean ethical idea. At this point I propose to leave this largely theoretical discussion to weave it in the reading of the psycho-rhetorical narrative of Russian neo-fascists.
4.3 The Success and Failure of Russian Neo-Fascism

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, whose ideology at least in appearance revolved around the idea of internationalism, Russian ethnic nationalists came out in the open with an ever more decisive force.\(^{108}\) One may recall, for example, a bomb blast at the Cherkizovsky market in 2006 (a place of work for many immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus before its shutdown in 2009) that left fourteen dead and about fifty injured.\(^ {109}\) While the neo-fascists who committed the terrorist act at the market tried to get rid of “too many people [there] of Asian background,” other right-wing extremists also fought with local “enemies of the Russian movement and the Russian nation”: “Antifa street thugs,” “low-life immigrants,” “Russophobe journalists,” “punishers wearing [police] shoulder straps and [judicial] robes.”\(^ {110}\) In addition to threats and beatings, some of the most successful neo-fascist actions include the murders of human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov (who was involved in a criminal case against a former Russian colonel guilty of the murder of a Chechen woman), a journalism student and Novaya Gazeta journalist Anastasia Baburina (who wrote about activities of neo-fascist groups), and independent anti-fascist (Antifa) activists Ilya Dzhaparidze and Ivan Khutorskoy.\(^ {111}\)

The SOVA Center for Information and Analysis – a non-government organization researching the issue of Russian ultranationalism - reported a steady rise of neo-fascists’ terrorist

---

\(^{108}\) As I already mentioned in Chapter Three, behind the idea of Soviet internationalism there was an attempt to transcend and eventually be rid of the political significance of national differences by folklorizing national identities. On folklorization of nationalism, see Sabanadze.

\(^{109}\) For more see “Intervention.”

\(^{110}\) Parfitt, “Moscow Blast” n. pag.; “Tikhonov-Khasis Trial” n. pag.; “Demushkin Knows” n. pag.

\(^{111}\) In case with the murders of Markelov and Baburina, Dzhaparidze, and Khutorskoy, the terrorist actions of neo-fascists were attributed to the Military Organization of Russian Nationalists (BORN), while the extremist group Spas (“the Savior”) was found guilty of the Cherkizovsky market bombing. The BORN most likely existed only virtually and was used as a brand by various neo-fascist groups. See “The BORN Case”; Mirovalev; “Moscow City Court Added”; “Moscow City Court Convicts”; “The Nationalists Charged”; “The Nationalist Organization BORN”; Sikorsky; “Tikhonov-Khasis Trial”; “Virtual Nationalists.”
activity since late 2008, not only in relation to mostly Muslim labor migrants from Russia’s North and South Caucasus and Central Asia, but also government agencies, such as police stations, military draft committees etcetera. While before 2008 most Russian ultranationalist groups either ignored or hoped for the Kremlin’s support, most recently in response to the government’s intensified crackdown on Russian neo-fascists, their rhetoric has become more pronouncedly anti-governmental: the government is considered to be “sick with Russophobia” and responsible for the “miserable condition of the ethnic Russians.” At the same time Russian neo-fascists have often avoided vocalizing their anti-governmental sentiments at protests or during interviews, since public anti-Kremlin speech would have certainly make them an object of a far more focused attention from the state.

Another prominent incident was a violent clash in Kondopoga (a Russian city in Karelia Republic) in early September 2006. Following a restaurant brawl between Chechens and ethnic Russians, which resulted in the death of two Russians, “troops” mobilized by the DPNI right-wing radicals arrived in the town to “assist” in pogroms against local residents of “Caucasian nationality.” Having failed to get the two-day riots under control promptly, Kondopoga’s authorities instead promised to consider the city residents’ petition to resettle all Caucasians (primarily Chechens) from Kondopoga. According to the leader of Karelia, Sergey Katanandov, “the main reason for the public unrest [is] that before our eyes representatives of other nations acted disrespectfully and belligerently, ignoring the mentality of our nation.”


113 The term “Caucasian” in Russian is not a race signifier, but a term used for people from the Caucasus region. The phrase “people of Caucasian nationality” (in Russian: “litsa kavkazskoj natsionalnosti”), or its equivalent “people of non-Slavic appearance” (in Russian: “litsa neslavianskoj vneshnosti”) is frequently used in the mass media and considered to be offensive to people from the Caucasus region. See Bigg: “Kadyrov”; Rodgers.

114 Yuriy Vasiliev n. pag.
thoughts did not seem to differ dramatically from Alexander Belov’s interpretation of the Kondopoga events. As the leader of the radically xenophobic DPNI Belov insisted that [ethnic Russian] people gathered to say that they were sick and tired [of non-Slavic immigrants]. One could hear only two phrases most of the time - “overrun” [Caucasians have overrun Russia] and “fed up” [Russians are fed up with Caucasians]. It is constant humiliation by those who came here that has forced [Russians] to stop fearing and come out [in the streets to protest].

The Kondopoga events have become an example that neo-fascists have been following ever since. The most recent, albeit unsuccessful, repetition of the Kondopoga scenario, when neo-fascists escalated a conflict to an ethnic fight, was the reaction to the devastating floods in Russia’s southern town of Krymsk in July 2012, which the extreme right attempted to explain in ethnically charged terms. Meskhetin Turk, Kurdish and Romany ethnic minorities were accused of taking advantage of the tragedy: “they snatch away humanitarian aid and take it home. Then they sell it. For a few days, when the town experienced problems with water, they took all the water and resold it at forty rubles.”

In the winter of 2010-2011, Russia again saw a series of racial clashes, which began on Moscow’s Manezh Square in response to the murder of soccer fan Yegor Sviridov by people from the Caucasus. Reportedly, up to 20,000 people gathered at Manezh Square. Never before were neo-fascists able to gather and announce their radical slogans so close to the Kremlin walls. According to Alexander Verkhovsky and Galina Kozhevnikova, the SOVA Center’s director and deputy director respectively, the violent ethnic outbursts on Manezh Square were the first successful attempt by the extreme right to transfer “the Kondopoga technology” - escalation of

---

115 Belov n. pag.
116 “There Can Be” n. pag.
117 For more information, see “Nurgaliyev”; Shuster, “Russia’s Race Riots.”
local incidents involving ethnic Russians and ethnic minorities with the goal to incite nationwide racial awareness and mobilization - to the heart of Moscow.\textsuperscript{118} The riot participants chanted racial slogans, raised hands in the fascist salute and subsequently attacked non-ethnic Russians who did not manage to leave Manezh Square on time. Shortly thereafter, racial attacks also occurred in the Moscow subway, where extreme nationalists assaulted non-Slavic-looking passengers.

While some neo-fascists engage in various forms of violent action, others look for “more legal venues for [their] actions.”\textsuperscript{119} The two streams of Russian neo-fascism do not seem to intersect, although the latter often seek to profit from the success of the former, as it was the case, for example, in Kondopoga when the DPNI arrived after the brawn had started to “[get] their dose of publicity, and that was it.”\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, there is a situation of mutual distrust and even contempt: radical neo-fascists believe that leaders of high-profile ultranationalist and neo-fascist organizations “more than once discredited themselves in the eyes of ultra-right youth,” while those, like the leader of the SS Dmitry Demushkin, who aspire to become a systemic political force in Russia, consider the “barren subculture” of ethnic national radicalism harmful as it discredits the whole movement.\textsuperscript{121} And it is precisely the rhetoric of such aspirations by the SS, the DPNI and the RID that is the focus of my present analysis.\textsuperscript{122}

While more aggressive autonomous neo-fascists have been successful in reacting swiftly to supposedly racially motivated incidents and inciting mass riots in Russia, neo-fascist

\textsuperscript{118} Verkhovsky and Kozhevnikova, “Phantom” n. pag. See also Yudina and Alperovich, “Summer 2011.”
\textsuperscript{119} “Demushkin Knows” n. pag.
\textsuperscript{120} Savvin, “The Birth of the Nation” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{121} “One for All” n. pag.; Kryukov n.pag. See also Verkhovsky and Kozhevnikova, “Phantom”; Yudina and Alperovich, “Winter 2010–2011.”
\textsuperscript{122} While the neo-fascist movement in Russia is somewhat ideologically heterogeneous and consists of various groups, which place different emphases within a range of similar issues or even take distinct positions on a number of minor points, ideas of ethnic, racial, religious and other types of exclusivity unite all groups under the umbrella of fascism. From this point of view, I am able to talk about a psycho-rhetorical narrative that is common to all Russian neo-fascists, notwithstanding their formal membership and insignificant ideological peculiarities.
organizations, in attempts to become a legitimate force in Russian politics, created “the brand of the Russian March.” The annual march of extreme nationalists and neo-fascists became a staple of November 4, in effect having replaced the original meaning of the day - National Unity Day. This holiday of national solidarity and patriotism marks the victory of the all-Russian volunteer army over the Polish invaders in 1612, which ended a painful and devastating period in Russia’s history, the Time of Troubles.

As I already mentioned in the Introduction, every year Russian nationalists and neo-fascists gather on November 4 to express their grievances toward people from the Caucasus and other parts of the former Soviet Union, Jews, communists, anti-fascists, liberals and occasionally the government and the president. Despite numerous protests by human rights activists, Russian liberal politicians, analysts and journalists, openly neo-fascist and xenophobic organizations continue to obtain permissions for this event (with the exception of 2006). Organizers of the Russian March submit multiple applications - requests to hold demonstrations in different places - in hopes that at least one application will satisfy the requirements of the authorities. Demushkin stated that in case all applications were denied, the Russian March was to take place anyway: “there is only one question for the authorities, whether the Russian March is to be sanctioned or it happens as demonstrators are breaking through the special police force cordons.”

Since 2009 permission has been granted to organize the Russian March in Moscow’s Lublino district - a residential area where residents have been extremely dissatisfied with a recent transfer of non-Russian vendors (many of whom are Asian illegal immigrants) from the

---

123 “Dmitry Demushkin on the Russian March” n.pag. See also “Levada Center Director.” While neo-fascist organizations use less radical tactics to be able to act more or less lawfully, they aspire for no less radical goals than autonomous neo-fascists.

124 “Closer” n. pag. See also “Demushkin”; “Russian March Will Be Held”; “Russian March Will Take Place.”
Cherkizovsky market to Lublino’s trading center. In 2012, the Russian March broke away from Moscow’s outskirts and returned to the center of Russia’s capital. Russian nationalists and neo-fascists once again walked along the Moscow River across from the Kremlin: “For us, it has been fundamentally important to get out of the captivity of the bedroom districts.”

As this short overview of the events that sparked public outcry shows, the actions of neo-fascists of either current cannot be dismissed as inconsequential. Racial riots and the Russian Marches, especially the Russian Marches of 2010-2013, which brought together 5,500-6,000 people, revived the Russian extreme nationalist scene. Hoping to push Russian ethnic nationalism past occasional covert street scuffles and partisan action to enter an open, large scale and politically significant struggle with the supposed enemies of Russia, the banned neo-fascist Slavic Union (SS) and the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DPNI), with the support of the Christian Orthodox and monarchist Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) and other ultranationalist organizations, founded the Ethnic-Political Association Russkie (“Russians”) in May 2011.

By “[uniting] national-democrats, national-socialists and national-monarchists” into a “the largest coalition of Russian [ethnic] nationalists” Russkie was supposed to become a serious contender in the arena of “legal socio-political activity.” As some Russian neo-fascists insisted, “[existing] ideological animosities [among members of the association] would be cancelled out by the commonality of major goals,” including their primary aim - “to restore Russian national statehood”:

At the moment the existence of the Russian nation is threatened. Our people is refused the right for national identification, the right for self-governance, all rights

---

125 See Karpov; “Open Letter”; “Traders.”
126 Bratersky n. pag.
127 See “Racism and Xenophobia”; Yudina and Alperovich, “Fall 2011.”
128 See “A ‘New’ Organization.”
129 “About Us” n. pag.; Bogatykh n. pag.; Bobrov n.pag.
and freedoms without any exception. Our country is being transformed into a colony used for its raw materials, where the state-forming titular ethnic group will follow the fate of native Americans - to die off quietly in reservations, while displaying hospitality and tolerance. We, Russian [ethnic] nationalists, think that it is possible to change the existing situation, moreover, this is our immediate responsibility.  

But no matter how resolute were the intentions of Russian neo-fascists, their aspirations were left unrewarded by success. The association lasted for about four years until its activity was suspended in August 2015 and the organization was banned as extremist in October 2015. Russkie was charged with stirring up racial hatred - the motive discerned in the group’s calls for “the creation of the nation-state and the struggle for national liberation by any means.”  

Although Russkie was just about the only legal major ultranationalist organization left in Russia, it was unable to withstand not so much the pressure from the state, as the consequences of its internal tension. Russkie already started to disintegrate following the 2014 Ukrainian revolution, the annexation of Crimea by Russian and the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The SS and DPNI sided with Ukraine, while the RID, having taken the pro-Putin stance on the Ukraine crisis, left the ranks of the Association (the latter, however, adopted an anti-Kremlin position as soon as Putin’s suspected support of pro-Russian protest forces in Eastern Ukraine waned). Russkie’s split was anything but sudden: the Russian nationalist movement was never able to act as one united front, which precisely is a reason of why it is not possible to talk about

---

130 “The DPNI Was” n.pag.; “Attention,” n. pag.; “Agreement,” n. pag. The eagerness to collaborate, as some think, could be treated as an attempt to gain wide public support by combined efforts usually before government elections, “because separately nobody takes [the Russian ethnic nationalists] seriously anymore.” However, as Aleksandr Verkhovsky, director of the SOVA Center, adds, Russian ethnic nationalists “[would] never able to unite, [since] it does not benefit them.” Bulin n. pag.; “One for All” n. pag.

131 “The Association Russkie” n.pag.

132 See Yudina and Alperovich, “Calm.”
Russian nationalism as a movement; instead there is rather a number of organizations and groups that represent extreme nationalist and neo-fascist views. As Demushkin admits, “modern Russian nationalists…[have been] walking in various directions by taking the coherent [nationalist philosophy] apart into the elements they like,” such as anti-Semitism, racism, imperialism and autocracy.133

Even before the ban at its most active, having become a nationalist force fairly noticeable by experts and law enforcement, Russkie failed to secure any significant popular support. Both Russian ultranationalists and those who have studied their activity agree that “[the] majority of Russians do not care for [the anti-systemic ethnic] nationalists,” “[whose] leaders are unknown and incomprehensible to ‘the average citizen,’ and whose voices fall on deaf ears.”134 As Demushkin and other ultranationalists believe, “[their] ideas have always been contained within the boundaries of a very tight media space. [They] never had a chance…to get [their] message across” to large audiences of major Kremlin-controlled TV channels.”135

According to Verkhovsky, the failure of extreme nationalists to reach average Russians can be rather attributed to the fact that “[Russians] cannot see themselves in the company of delinquents with a knife in the pocket,” rather than to the authorities’ pressure.136 This is, however, not to say that Russians do not also experience the deep inner rejection of ethnic hatred. On the contrary, the level of xenophobia has been persistently high: according to the 2013 Levada polls, 66 percent of respondents across Russia and 84 percent of Muscovites agree

133 “Mystic National Socialism” n. pag. Whereas the SS leader acknowledges the problem of ideological disagreement among Russian ultranationalists, the DPNI emphasizes the role of the “Russophobe” state in the inability of Russian nationalists to get into mainstream politics: “The main principle that anti-Russian forces hold to is the classic ‘divide and conquer.’ Ideological, religious, and personal discord is being spread among Russian nationalists in order to shake our unity, achieved at the first Russian March, which so scared out enemies and opponents.” The DPNI Was” n.pag.
134 Azar, “We Will Become” n.pag.; Kryukov n.pag. See also “The Russian March as a Response” n.pag.
135 Azar, “We Will Become” n.pag.
136 “The Russian March as a Response” n.pag.
with the slogan of the Russian March - “Russia for Russians” (although they hardly ever participate in the Russian March or any other events organized and supported by Russian ultranationalists). As Lev Gudkov, the director of the Russian non-governmental polling and sociological research Levada Center, and Verkhovsky, the director of the SOVA Center, emphasize, the majority of Russians simply prefer to bank on the state: “People are afraid of [neo-fascist radicalism] as an expression of unlawful behavior, outrage, violence…[they] surrender their will to the state, expecting that the latter will set everything right.” This, in its turn, can be explained by the role of the obsessive national subject which Russians most often assume in relation to the state: while they largely agree with those who accuse the authorities, including the president, of corruption or another kind of misconduct or crime, they nevertheless remain loyal to the state and consider any challenge directed against the state as an immediate threat to themselves, more precisely, to their image of the coherent, ideal national self. As a consequence, the majority of Russians persistently choose stability and order over the role of civil society to contest or negotiate policies and practices of the state, as well as other democratic values.

Having felt the increasing squeeze of the state and being able neither to attract ordinary Russians, the majority of which are noticeably xenophobic, nor to guide and shape the “truly massive and potent, but totally unorganized” force that most autonomous neo-fascists present,

---

137 “The Russian March as a Response” n.pag. In comparison to 2013, in 2015 the number of Russians who support the ethnic nationalist idea “Russia for Russians” dropped to 51 percent, which, however, does not mean that Russian people became more tolerant and less xenophobic. As Karina Pippiya, a sociologist of the Levada Center, explains, since 2014 ethnic nationalists sentiments of most Russians have been invested in the problem of Russia’s confrontation with Ukraine and the West. See “The Level of Xenophobia,” as well as “Russians on the Situation” n. pag.; “Every Second”; “Patriotism”; “Russian March and Inter-Ethnic Relations.”

138 “The Russian March as a Response” n.pag.

139 According to the 2015 Levada polls, about 80 percent of Russians have confidence in Putin, while 29 percent believe that the president, like all politicians, may abuse power and 31 percent think that Putin’s dishonesty, if the accusations are true, does not matter since “the country started to live better under Putin.” “Confidence” n.pag. See also “Our ‘We’.”

140 See “Better than Freedom”; “The Majority of Russians.”
Russian neo-fascist organizations failed to spark the genuine “people’s protests,” similar to the racial clashes on Manezh Square.141 Under such circumstances, Demushkin warns, even less extreme ethnic nationalists are likely to go radical: “Now [ethnic] nationalists will become a Russian ‘ISIS,’ and this situation will dominate [the scene of Russia ethnic nationalism] for some time.”142 In fact, the SOVA Center has already noted an increasing militarization of Russian neo-fascist organizations.143 Russian neo-fascists engage in more regular combat training of volunteers participating in the military conflict in Ukraine’s Donbass on both sides, which upon their return are most likely to participate in violent anti-immigrant or anti-governmental (or both) activities in Russia: “there will be blood, lots of blood….In that blood (which is largely going to be the blood of [ethnic] Russians!) the non-cohesive mass of ethnic Russians will resurge as the Russian nation.”144

Russian neo-fascists, however, do not give up on their plans to “organize [Russian] people, unite the best of them” into nationwide protests, although “not to support a particular politician with a specific program, but to talk about general acute problems.”145 Lacking an opportunity to reach large audiences through mainstream largely state-controlled media outlets, Russian neo-fascist organizations decide to retreat from the public eye and instead concentrate on “forming the Russian public opinion” through “everyday campaigning among the civic and ethnic majority of [the] country, rather than relying on a single event that is hard to get permission for from the occupation regime.”146

---

142 Azar, “We Will Become” n.pag. Tolerast (tolerasts in plural) is a compound word made of “tolerant” and “pederast” to derogatorily refer to liberal minded politicians.
143 See Yudina and Alperovich, “Pro-Kremlin and Oppositional.”
144 Savvin, “The Birth of the Nation” n.pag.
145 Gumanova n.pag.
146 Kryukov n.pag.
4.4 The Tragic Imagery of Russian Neo-Fascism

Even at a glance it is obvious that Russian neo-fascism is a fairly distinct vision of the nation which cannot and should not be completely and totally compared to historic fascism. But as any radically exclusive embrace of the nation, the Russian national fantasy is a narrative that aspires for the maximum coherence of the national image, that is, for a conspiratorial interpretation of the world, where nothing, not even the Real, which is theorized by Lacan as the provenance of pure contingency, is left to a chance. Since the national subject never equals the perfect image it lays claim to, such unity is always anticipated. In this anticipation the role of the symptom, as I pointed out in Chapter Two, is of the utmost importance. The symptom marks the place in the national subject’s fantasy through which the knowledge of inconsistency, or lack, which has been originally expelled into the unconscious, comes back. This memory of the founding lack, however, returns as a metaphor – in the form of something that separates the national subject from its objet a, or something that destroys the supposed coherence of the national image. The truth of the symptom or the meaning of the symptom as metaphor, however, is that it does not preclude the national subject from the aspired perfection of its national image; instead, the national subject owes the consistency of its national fantasy to the symptom.

Since, according to Lacan, “[the] manifestation of the subject’s symptoms is dominated by those relational elements that in an imaginary way color his/her relations with objects,” the analysis of the psycho-rhetorical narrative must start at the level of the national subject’s imaginary connection to the national other.\(^{147}\) Most tragic national subjects look for the source of, as well as a solution to, the unbearable incompleteness of the self in images of national others, while in comic national fantasies symptoms are located within the national self – as an

error or imperfection to master. As the close reading of Russian fascist fantasy below demonstrates, Russian neo-fascists attribute their surging displeasure to the actions of somebody else.

Despite the schism among Russian neo-fascists around the issue of the Putin-led military involvement in Ukraine, Putin is predominantly portrayed as the most immediate and callous enemy of ethnic Russians.\textsuperscript{148} Putin is accused of being “Russia’s main fascist,” whose regime, as Russian neo-fascists argue, aims at the national, cultural, economic and political oppression of ethnic Russians.\textsuperscript{149} Thus, for example, Putin’s politics arguably consist in replacing the “true” Russian idea with “the brain virus” of a “multicultural-Russophile mode of thinking,” which supposedly depletes ethnic Russians’ experience of otherness and thus the idea of the self as autonomous subject.\textsuperscript{150} Despite Putin’s repeated claims that ethnic Russians are “the state-forming people,” that they comprise the essence, “the ethnic foundation of Russia,” Russian neo-fascists compare Putin’s rhetoric with the Soviet thesis of “the friendship of nations“ and explain both as harmful anti-Russian practices with double standards: “ethnic Russians are expected to be friendly with every nation and ethnic group, but [they] do not get the same treatment. Everybody in Russia, except ethnic Russians, can insist on special treatment. But the slogan ‘Russians, unite!’ is deemed ‘fascist.’”\textsuperscript{151} Putin arguably “[turns] Russia into a miserable diminished copy of the USSR,” “an empire in reverse” or a “colony,” where ethnic Russians are the colonized people, thus negating the aspiration of the latter toward becoming their absolute, pure self.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{148} Although regarded by some as “an accidental or/and forced [political] partner,” Russian neo-fascists nevertheless warn that “one must not trust Putin and \textit{Putinists}.” Pioneer-lj n.pag.
\textsuperscript{149} Mukhin n. pag. See also “Russians against Putin.”
\textsuperscript{150} “Fear and Hate” n. pag.; “Putin Flirts” n. pag.; “Renting out” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{151} Putin, “Russia” n.pag.; “Putin Bets” n.pag.; Aboimov n.pag.
\textsuperscript{152} Krylov, “Migrantocracy” n.pag.; “The Round Table Discussion” n.pag.
Thus, for example, Putin’s regime arguably aids in promoting Islam, Judaism and other
religions at the expense of the Russian Orthodox culture. As Russian neo-fascists lament,
pointing to the former “Deputy Prime Minister of the occupation government, Chechen-Jew
Aslambek Dudayev, better known as Vladislav Surkov,” representatives of ethnic minorities
hold high-ranking positions and receive preferential treatment everywhere else, in short, enjoy
themselves to the full: on the labor market, in the education sector, in the army, and, more
importantly, before the law. Putin is deemed to be guilty of covering up crimes committed by
non-ethnic Russians, while at the same time denying the “democratic” rights and freedoms of
Russian nationalists and accusing them of extremism. Besides, by increasing income taxes,
skimping on pension payments, financing a comfortable lifestyle of “the Kremlyad,” “[giving]
away the lands soaked in sweat and blood of [ethnic Russians]…to the enemies” both in the East
and the West, as well as “feeding the Caucasus, hordes of Asian migrants, and even the
Libyans,” “making annual monetary contributions to the NATO states at the expense of Russia’s
national wealth,” and, finally, “surrendering resources of the country to its geopolitical
adversary[ies],” such as China and countries of Western Europe, Putin supposedly engages in
economic terrorism against ethnic Russians.

Having toughened the financial burden of the Russian people, who “eat worse than did
the captives in Nazi Germany,” “the present genocidal regime of Putin does everything to lower

---

153 See “Fursenko”; “Islam Is Inculcated”; “Judaism to Prisons”; “Putin’s Plan.”
154 “Surkov” n.pag. Also see “The Army Recruits”; “Dagestan Authorities”; “From Militsiya”; “Immigrants
Will Become”; “Ingush Opposition”; “Playing the Nationalist Card”; “Russians Suffer”; “Thousands of Tajiks”;
“United Russia”; “Zhirinovsky Wants.”
155 “The People from the Caucasus,” n. pag.; “Renting out” n. pag.
156 Kremlyad is a derogatory word for “the Kremlin elite,” which is a composite of the words “Kremlin”
and “prostitute.” It is interesting that the Russian fascist fantasy is full of references to the supposed perversity of the
Increases” n. pag.; “The Economy of the RF” n.pag. Also see Aladin; “Economic Terrorism”; “Edros’
the chances of ethnic Russians for physical survival.”\textsuperscript{157} The Kremlin is also accused of attempting “to destabilize the traditional family, decrease birth rates and depopulate nations” by flooding the country with drugs and alcohol, passing legislation with regard to, for example, surrogacy, abortion, pediatric organ donation.\textsuperscript{158} Each and every action of Putin and state authorities, perceived as unerring rational actors, is interpreted by Russian neo-fascists as a part of the conspiratorial plot to rob Russia of its strength, or the \textit{objet a}, embodied in such part-objects as the country’s land, wealth and natural resources, which in effect contributes to the physical annihilation of ethnic Russians and the demise of the Russian idea, the bearers of which are exclusively the former. Unlike Soviet leaders who – on ideological grounds – suppressed national sentiments for the sake of keeping “the imperial USSR” together, as Russian neo-fascists insist, Putin’s rhetoric is devoid of any ideological, or “sincere,” motive, in other words.\textsuperscript{159} Although purportedly stirring up the contradictory ethnic nationalist and multicultural sentiments in the country, Putin’s politics “purposefully runs against Russia’s interests,” moved by either “maniac non-reflexive Russophobia” or “purely selfish, personal interests.”\textsuperscript{160} In short, Putin is portrayed as unapologetically tragic - evil, inhumane, sneaky and lying.

At the same time, in the neo-fascist national fantasy Putin is not the only or even the ultimate national other; instead, he/she is rather considered as a venal, profiteering underhanded agent of Russia’s enemies both in the West and the East. In the West, the properly tragic national enemy is the “Yid-Mason[ic],” “Yid-democratic global backstage” which pursues the politics of

\textsuperscript{157} “Russian Citizens Eat” n.pag.; “Total Poverty” n.pag. See also “Putin Can”; “Putin’s Plan.”
\textsuperscript{159} Susov n.pag.; Demushkin n.pag.
\textsuperscript{160} Triller n. pag.; Susov n.pag.; Demushkin n.pag. See also “The Russian State.” Russian neo-fascists believe that Putin has been capitalizing on both the nationalist and imperial aspects of the Russian idea as the only viable way to prevent Russia and thus the Kremlin’s power from dissolving.
“totalitarian….capitalism.” The latter is designed to suppress the “true” democratic rights and freedoms of nations (including ethnic Russians) and to destroy national economies “with endless crises and dead end technologies” just to generate profits for “the world oligarchy.” Any kind of economic cooperation with the West then is perceived by Russian neo-fascists as just another step toward “the [final] loss of national sovereignty,” that is, the national subject’s certainty qua independence from the Other, which will allow Russia’s enemies to split and “absorb [the defragmented Russia’s body] bit by bit.”

In fact, as Russian neo-fascists insist, the post-Soviet Russian state was created as a “semi-colonial state” by the U.S.,” seen as the center of “the world Judo-Masonic government,” composed of “Jews and Anglo-Saxons, swept by the fierce hatred toward the ethnic Russians and Russian Orthodoxy.” By arguably supplying Western Europe and the U.S. with natural resources and serving as a commodity market, that is, by offering its national body as an instrument of the national other’s enjoyment, “the Russian Federation de facto props up American [and Western European] econom[ies]” and strengthens the current power position of the West. In other words, Russian neo-fascists, curiously, see the relationship between the West and Russia in terms of a perverse connection between a sadist and its victim respectively. This, however, is not to say that perversion or, to be more specific, masochism is the structure of the Russian neo-fascist national subject. Instead, rather than being a masochist, Russian neo-fascists attribute the qualities of the former to Russia, thus setting up the tragically inspired elegy, which I discuss later in this section.

---

161 Nazarov n.pag; Sablin n.pag.
162 Saveliev, “To Shape” n.pag.
163 “The Economy of the RF” n.pag.
164 Basmanov, “Putinism” n.pag.; Turik n.pag.
165 Basmanov, “Putinism” n.pag.
In addition to the economic pressure, the West attempts to get Russia out of the way politically, having given Putin “a top priority task – to prevent ethnic Russians from taking back their own state.”\textsuperscript{166} As Russian neo-fascists continue, “[a] wealthy, free and truly independent Russia...bodes no good for the U.S., the EU and anybody else in the world, because as such it will start producing its own goods, it will become a rightful [economic and political] player in the world.”\textsuperscript{167} In short, numerous national enemies are intimidated by Russia that is complete unto itself.

Simultaneously, Russian neo-fascists express solidarity with “European brothers,” as well as voice their concern about the future of “Mother-Europe” packed with “aggressive and uncontrollable barbarians who are ready to break and burn everything at the drop of a hat.”\textsuperscript{168} Apparently Russian neo-fascists do not give up on the idea of “White Europe” united against its enemies – both non-white, non-Christian population and the so-described global anti-national regime of cynical profit-seekers.\textsuperscript{169} Although Russian neo-fascists claim to “love very much our European brothers” (which the former thereby clearly distinguish from “the modern masters of the world”), they see white Europeans as severely mistaken or fooled by the arguably cynical and vulturine world government: “the modern European world lives in the state of moral numbness, thoughtlessness and spinelessness.”\textsuperscript{170} As the belief in the truth, or essence, of the nation (and “only the truth of God is above the truth of the nation”) vanishes, “people become, as is the case in the West, biped economic, domestic animals, whose interests are limited to the problems of stable keeping and entertainment.”\textsuperscript{171} Lacking the mobilizing power of ethnic nationalism and

\textsuperscript{166} Basmanov, “Putinism” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{167} Basmanov, “Putinism” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{168} “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.; Sablin n.pag.
\textsuperscript{169} “Russian Nationalists’ Address’ n.pag.
\textsuperscript{170} “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.; Basmanov, “Putinism” n.pag.; Turik n.pag.
\textsuperscript{171} Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.; Turik n.pag.
infected with “viruses such as ‘political correctness’ and ‘tolerance’,” all of which “reveals the lack of immune resistance” to foreign elements, that is, the Otherness, the weakness of white Europeans, as Russian neo-fascists insist, is “perilous” as they are facing their “racial and religious enemies posing as Muslim ‘refuges’.”

Russian neo-fascists also remind white Europeans how “a ‘respected’ European bourgeois” treacherously left “the most loyal sons of Mother-Europe” to face their enemies – first, “Bolshevik terror,” the Soviet state and, later, Putin’s tyranny – alone. Making a reference to the post-World War II repatriation of Cossacks, who collaborated with Nazi Germany, which was carried out by the British by deceit and force, Russian neo-fascists lament that

[the] martyrs of the Lienz [displaced persons] camp and other places trusted [the British] so much that only the very reality [of the repatriation] could convince them otherwise. So the myth of gentleship and special military ethics of the British Army, as well as Western Europeans in general vanished. It was replaced by the image of a rude, stupid and heartless creature.

Whereas Russian neo-fascists’ sentiments toward their “European brothers” may seem to contain a comic impulse, the former are rather moved by the indecision of the grotesque, struggling to embrace the latter as long as they conform to the way of living promoted by the “Yid-democratic global backstage.” In addition to the tragic grotesque, Russian neo-fascists’ attitude toward Europeans that purportedly forgo the values of white Christian Europe can be also viewed as a dismissive caricature. To laugh heartlessly at a caricature image of the national other, rather than

172 “The Fear and Hate” n.pag.; Turik n.pag.
173 “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.
174 “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.
175 Nazarov n.pag.
calling for its total elimination, functions as a kind of compromise between tragedy or comedy proper, invited by the absence of a definitive stance with regard to the national other. The latter is then neither fully rejected as evil, nor accepted as merely mistaken, although it can be perceived as more tragic or more comic. In this case the attitude of radical ambivalence, or the burlesque, gravitates toward the tragic pole, albeit it may not be as tragic as the position of Russian neo-fascists with respect to immigrants from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and other regions.

Hoping to ward off ethnic Russians from liberating Russia, from restoring the country’s “extremely great” potential as a promise of national identity fullness, Putin purportedly also plays into the hands of Russia’s enemies in the East. In addition to the arguably snide intentions of China in the Russian Far East and Siberia, Russian neo-fascists are concerned with the influx of labor immigrants from the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia. A palpably tragic attitude toward the latter is explained by the supposedly existing “incompatibility of characters and blood“ of ethnic Russians and “flocking mlecchas.” Such preexisting psychological and biological conflict, as Russia neo-fascists believe, is exacerbated by “the impudence of ethnic criminal groups, which consist of far from the best representatives of the Caucasus, Central Asia, African countries and some other states,” and their “aggression and ostentatious disrespect toward ethnic Russians.”

Although Russian neo-fascists maintain an unreservedly tragic attitude mostly toward “ethnic mafias,” or “Caucasian criminals,” and “wacko Wahhabis” (which must be dealt with decidedly – by means of physical annihilation if necessary), generally the Eastern “barbarian” national enemy is depicted as another tragically marked burlesque character – lazy, uneducated

176 Basmanov, “Putinism” n.pag.
177 Demushkin n.pag. The word “mleccha” originates from Sanskrit and stands for “barbarian.”
178 Demushkin n.pag.; Benediktov “The Nation’s Ghost” n.pag.
and uncivilized, rather than unapologetically evil, or tragic.179 In the burlesque national fantasy promoted by Russian neo-fascists “dark-skinned people from [their] mountain villages” come to Russia and “get rich at the expense of ethnic Russians”; they bring over their “degenerate” work culture and “live in Moscow by their tribal laws”; they easily get their “Ph.D.s’ [in] Churkestan [but] cannot put two plus two together”; they receive internships in Russian universities “to gain experience selling various national products, for example, opiates”; and they obtain Russian citizenship by simply having “a graduate degree (although we all know what graduate degrees from Central Asian universities are worth).”180

In Russian neo-fascists’ tragic burlesque the national other, however, is even welcomed into the national fantasy, since, as Russian neo-fascists emphasize, “getting to know another nation is a prerequisite of national consciousness.”181 Such understanding by Russian neo-fascists of the role of the national other runs counter to Kristeva’s explanation of fascism as a perverse attempt at dissolving otherness and arriving at the pre-Symbolic kind of oceanic limitlessness. Instead, Russian neo-fascists aspire for the idea of the autonomous national self, which exists only by virtue of its opposition to the national other. Therefore, “the main point of all anti-immigrant sentiments is not to make the government deport several million of immigrants, but to bid farewell to immigrants in the popular mindset.”182 In other words, the anti-immigrant rhetoric supposedly animates Russian national sentiment by inviting ethnic Russians to shake off their Soviet identity by rejecting the idea of, in Žižek’s terms, decaffeinated Otherness manifested in the old Soviet slogan of “the friendship of the nations.”

181 “Demushkin n. pag.
182 Susov n.pag.
Russian neo-fascists, however, do not truly recognize the key role of the “constitutive outside,” or in other words, the constitutive function of the national other in the process of national identity construction.\textsuperscript{183} If they did, they would find themselves in close proximity to the Lacanian-Burkean ethical ideal, when the national subject identifies with its own lack concealed behind the symptom – the figure of the national other, and therefore sees the latter in a comic light. Instead, in line with Carl Schmitt’s tragic definition of politics as the locus of the inescapable tension between national subjects who happen to become enemies in a particular situation, Russian neo-fascists emphasize the mobilizing potential of the menacing figure of the purportedly barbaric immigrant.\textsuperscript{184}

In fact, the whole neo-fascist narrative of the relationship that exists between ethnic Russians and their national others, be they immigrants, ethnic minorities that contribute to the multinational makeup of the country or other peoples that fight for their right to self-determination in Russia’s immediate sphere of influence and beyond, is permeated with an attitude of tragic ambivalence, or the tragically marked burlesque. Filled with appreciation for the ability of the non-Slavic Muslim population in Russia to preserve their traditions and ethnic identity, Russian neo-fascists, however, are outraged that “[d]uring Muslim holidays [Moscow] turns into *Moscowbad*.”\textsuperscript{185} As Russian neo-fascists explain, they have nothing against any other religion and culture as long as they are promoted beyond Russia’s borders (which, as I show below, diverge greatly from the internationally established borders of the Russian Federation):

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnotes}
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{183} Mouffe 15.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{184} According to Carl Schmitt, “[t]he phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever present possibility of the friend-and-enemy groupings, regardless of the aspects which this possibility implies for morality, aesthetics, and economics.” Further, “[o]nly the actual participants can correctly recognize, understand, and judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme case of conflict. Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent’s way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one’s own form of existence.” Schmitt 35, 27. On the problem of transforming the political as antagonism into the political as agonism, see Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*..
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{185} Benediktov, “The Nation’s Ghost” n.pag. See also Sablin.
\end{footnotes}
\end{footnotesize}
“Inside Russia we cannot honestly permit such equality....Do as you please at home, think of yourselves as equal or even superior, but as soon as you encounter our way of life, you must follow it.”  

Similarly Russian neo-fascists nevertheless claim to defend the rights of ethnic groups that have no ties to any national formations outside Russia (for instance, the Chuvashs, the Bashkirs), “[but] under the condition that they are not separatists and do not impose their way of life and traditions to others.” The rhetoric of the supposed benevolent national authority and tolerance of ethnic Russians functions as an empty, formal gesture: such “benevolence” and “tolerance” apply to whatever is left of ethnic and cultural diversity after legalizing the status of ethnic Russians as the state-forming nation, refusing cultural and political autonomy to non-ethnic Russians, enforcing the practice of assimilation, as well as implementing the full range of economic, demographic and territorial measures toward “desocialization,” or population control, among ethnic groups that cannot be assimilated.

Such efforts, according to Russian neo-fascists, do not infringe on the rights of non-ethnic Russians, since “their rights have been already maximally exercised – they have their own republics, influential lobbies, cultural autonomies,” and all the more exercised at the expense of ethnic Russians. Thus Russian neo-fascists effectively deny ethnic minorities in Russia any political significance: just as in Soviet times, non-ethnic Russian nationalisms are rejected through the folklorization of ethnic diversity. Thus it is not surprising that Russian neo-fascists discuss freedoms and rights of non-ethnic Russians in administrative terms: Belov, for example,

---

186 Demushkin n.pag.
188 Leontyev n. pag. Also see Sablin. Other proposed measures aimed at restoring all privileges that ethnic Russians can arguably “enjoy by birthright” include “a ban on Russophobic hate speech in mass media, an introduction of the death penalty for anybody involved in the drug trade, stiffer penalties for foreigners who commit crimes against [ethnic Russians and other] indigenous population” of the country.
189 Remizov n. pag.
has characterized the convicted Norwegian fascist mass murderer and terrorist Anders Behring Breivik as none other than “an effective manager.”

As if echoing Stalin’s answer to the national question in the Soviet Union, Russian neo-fascists are ready “to influence the will of nations so that the nations may arrange their affairs in the way that will best correspond to the interests of the [ethnic Russians].” Unlike Stalin, who “had to hide behind the official ideology of Marxism in attempts to ‘smuggle’ ethnic Russian nationalism” into the Soviet Union, Russian neo-fascists decisively reject the Soviet rhetoric of multiculturalism, the very idea of which is deemed “illusory,” “blasphemous” and outright dangerous: the blending of nations and cultures arguably “goes against laws of nature and is simply biologically impossible” and thus often “risks ending with a bloodbath.”

Praising Stalin’s swift measures in dealing with the Chechens, the Ingush, the Crimean Tatars, the Kalmucks, the Azeri and other ethnic groups in the Soviet Union that purportedly collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War, Russian neo-fascists are certain that “the friendship of the nations’ has been possible only by resorting to repressive measures and total control [which they explicitly support], or by means of insane subsidies [to some former Soviet republics]” (and Russian neo-fascists unequivocally prefer the former).

By pointing out the failure of the Soviet and European strategies of multiculturalism, Russian neo-fascists state that only “a strong, although alien, national culture is much more likely to become a foundation for the integration[, although not equality,] of ethnic minorities, rather than the void in its place.”

---

190 “Fascist Russia?” n.pag.
191 Stalin n. pag. In Stalin’s quote the emphasis is on the interests of the proletariat, rather than the ethnic Russians.
193 See Sablin n.pag.
194 Remizov n. pag.
have to rely on some preferred ethnic national vision to sustain itself and, even more so, by ignoring a more radical view of the structural void or lack in the center of any identity, Russian neo-fascists instead offer to organize the national vision of Russia as a multicultural state around the nation’s essence, its objet a. As the function of lack and the unattainable object that guarantees identity fullness, the objet a is represented symptomatically by the purported strength and authority of ethnic Russians. The status of ethnic Russians as state-forming is arguably a paramount condition of a viable “union of nations,” an historical example of which Russian neo-fascists see in Russia’s imperial past.\textsuperscript{195} Being home to various nations, the Russian Empire purportedly possessed “all the conditions for ethnic Russians to become a modern political nation, when traditional society morphs into a conscious community of national solidarity.”\textsuperscript{196} In other words, Russian neo-fascists contend that when the idea of ethnic and cultural peculiarity is perceived not only on the most immediate, emotional, or unconscious, level, but is also grasped rationally, the nation gets to become a political, civic formation.

Drawing on the utterly misconstrued version of Anderson’s theory of the nation as an imagined political community, Russian neo-fascists juxtapose Rossiysky (“Russian”) and Russky (“ethnic Russian”), civic and ethnic types of national identity: the former is described largely as an outcome of an “‘industrial’ production” and “mass dissemination of [a national vision],” while the latter is viewed in terms of the Real - as an always already existing “organic and natural formation,” which is “solidified in high culture (including literary language, art, a body of foundational texts…”\textsuperscript{197} Communities that gave up on its objet a – the truth or essence of the nation, and instead are tied together by the principles of Western civic nationalism are arguably

\textsuperscript{195} Remizov n. pag.
\textsuperscript{196} Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{197} Leontyev n.pag.; Remizov n.pag. Putin and nationalist people’s protest. True civic society is in the latter.
“propelled by herd instinct and promises of material well-being,” which bring people back to a state of primordial, “faceless,” “shapeless” “biomass,” before they were supposedly molded into ethnic communal organisms by the divine will. Taught by the experience of Russian Empire, ethnic Russians then choose to be a Russky, rather than a Rossiysky nation.

Comparing Russky nationalism to a Western model of civic identification, Russian neo-fascists argue that nationhood defined by common citizenship is out of touch with the Real, that is, it is never more than a fabricated kind of nationalism that presupposes “loyalty of the nation to bureaucrats,” who purportedly are not bound by any moral and ideological considerations, while the principle of ethnic belonging ensures the loyalty of authorities to the nation: “In other words, if we are a nation of Rossiyan (“Russians”), we are serfs of the state (in a sense that we are bonded to a certain piece of land by way of dividing the Soviet inheritance… among nomenklatura clans). If we are Russkiye (“ethnic Russians”), then we are potential owners, citizens [of the state] eager to accede to their sovereign rights.” Furthermore, for Russian neo-fascists, Russky is a “truly” civic or political kind of nation-building, since it allows them to defend the political and other rights of the ethnic majority, while Western attempts at fostering a sense of national unity reflect nothing but venal desires of national bureaucracy and world oligarchy. Only when the political reason of civic nationalism is built on ethnic mythology as an appeal to emotions and the irrational, as Russian neo-fascists emphasize, can the national “consciousness [be in harmony] with the [national] unconscious,” and the nation “experience the continuity of its historical identity.” Such idiosyncratic interpretation of ethnic and civic types of nationalism stems from the radically tragic vision of nationhood, which manifests itself as follows. First, while placing an emphasis on the Real, or the biology, of the nation, Russian neo-

199 Remizov n.pag.
200 Remizov n.pag. See also Savelyev, “To Shape.”
fascists deny the Real its nature as pure contingency. As a result, national identity is understood not as a process of historically and thus rhetorically contingent negotiation set in motion by the structural negativity of the national subject, but as a destiny of the national organism that persists in its tragic literality.

Inspired by Russia’s imperial legacy, Russian neo-fascists are eager to cut down the flow of federal budget money to the “parasitic” Southern provinces of the Russian Federation such as, for example, the Chechen Republic, while refusing to part with those territories, even if that means turning to coercion.\textsuperscript{201} To keep Russia whole as it “was spreading to the south, the east and even the west” is taken to be a “historical mission” of the state-forming ethnic Russians, who “[contributed] to that great movement with their arms, legs, head, and, finally, blood.”\textsuperscript{202} Yet the sacrifice that ethnic Russians make with their “pound of flesh” is not the sacrifice of the Real of the national body, understood as land, recourses and lives of ethnic Russians, but the sacrifice of the \textit{objet a}.\textsuperscript{203} The “loss” of this special organ, as explained in Chapter Two, is the price one “pay[s] for that mystical operation” of subjectivization.\textsuperscript{204} By misrecognizing the originary lack for losses that the national subject purportedly has to endure at the hands of its national others in attempts to sustain the ideal of Russianness, Russian neo-fascists urge ethnic Russians to exercise their “birth-given right” to be in charge of Russia. Considering the failure to do so from the perspective of tragic mourning, Russian neo-fascists contend that the country is purportedly bound either to transform into something “unnatural, abnormal from the point of view of the spirit, the race, and the nation” - a some kind of “Frankenstein” monster-state with “arms, legs, 

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{201} Susov n.pag.
\textsuperscript{202} Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “The Essence of the Empire” n.pag.; Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{203} Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book VII} 322.
\textsuperscript{204} Lacan, \textit{Seminar, Book VII} 322.
\end{flushright}
heart and head [grafted together] from different corpses, that is, different peoples,” or to be taken apart.  

Haunted by the images of *corps morcelé*, or the body in pieces, which arguably becomes the destiny of the multicultural state founded on the Western liberal concept of tolerance, Russian neo-fascists, however, reject the ideal of the pure monoethnic nation-state. Instead they call to rehabilitate Russia’s imperial body: “Russia precisely as the nation-state of ethnic Russians and acting as a guarantor of the rights of ethnic minorities stands a good chance to reintegrate Russian territories, sawn off in 1991.”  

Such territories include “Russian enclaves,” or “the areas of historical and predominant living” of “the divided Russian nation,” the lands “given by God, developed by our ancestors, paid for with their blood and bequeathed to us and future generations.” Russian neo-fascists thus see the ideal of the Russian nation in the image of ethnic Russians who by the fact of their sheer presence in a certain territory, or the Real of their habitation, define the reach of the interests of the Russian state: “Russia exists there where ethnic Russians are. There is no Russia where there are no ethnic Russians. Russia’s territory ends there.” A similar sentiment, which attaches particular importance to the Real conditions of the life of the nation - the value that the country’s territory and the benefit of the dispersion of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers far beyond the country’s borders, is also characteristic of the rhetoric of Putin-sponsored *Nashi*, and its political significance is compatible with tragic implications of political realism.

---

205 Krylov, “Migrantocracy” n.pag.; “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag. See also Kholmogorov.  
206 Susov n.pag.  
207 “Russian Nationalists’ Address” n.pag.; “Russians Have the Right!” n.pag.  
208 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “The Essence of the Empire” n.pag. Such narrative of Russia’s supposedly warranted influence beyond its internationally recognized borders harkens back to Hitler’s calls and actions taken toward “guarding [Germany’s] more restricted interests” and “those German folks [outside Germany] who are not in a position to secure … their political and [human] freedom by their own efforts.” Such comparison has been worrisome to some former Soviet Republics, especially after Russia carried out a stealth military intervention in the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea in 2014, which subsequently was annexed by the former. Hitler, “Speech to Reichstag” n.pag.
Echoing the Nazi doctrine of *Geopolitik*, Russian neo-fascists see the nation as an organism “living in harmony with nature and according to its laws,” which must be able to broaden its *Lebensraum*, its living space, as it grows: “Such is the gloomy, but vital geopolitical justice, or law.” Following this aggressive, tragic “logic of Russian history,” neo-fascists claim Russia’s authority over former Soviet republics. Moreover, the other Slavic nations – the Ukrainians and the Belarusians, are not even considered as separate ethnicities: both Belarus and Ukraine were “never associated with any ethnic group or a separate nation, but are territories populated by ethnic Russians that found themselves in different states after the Tatar invasion and the Polish conquest.” Simultaneously Russian neo-fascists, in particular the SS, applauds Estonia’s, and Ukraine’s struggle to escape the grip of its “elder brother” as a remnant of the Soviet politics, as well as admire ethnic nationalist aspirations anywhere in the world.

Neither friends nor enemies, immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as ethnic groups that contribute to the multinational makeup of the country and other nations that fight for the right to self-determination in Russia’s immediate sphere of influence and beyond, are arguably “strangers” or, in the case with Ukraine, estranged brothers (and, as Russian neo-fascists emphasize, “a stranger is not necessarily an enemy”). The national stranger functions as the ultimate spectral other, the one in whom the national subject sees an image of the self and somebody else, the one that attracts and repulses, the one that invites fascination and aggression. This contradictory relationship, as Lacan explains, is “the play of the see-saw between [the ego] and [its semblance in the mirror - the alter ego],” a paranoid oscillation between familiar and alien images that the national subject alternately sees in its national other as in the mirror,

---

209 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “The Essence of the Empire” n.pag. On the origins of the Nazi *Geopolitik* see Agnew and Muscarà; Saul Bernard Cohen; White.
210 Susov n.pag.
211 Basmanov, “Who Are Rusnatsy?” n.pag. See also Aver’yanov-Minsky; “Frequently Asked Questions.”
212 Susov n.pag.
revealing the fundamental division and inadequacy, or the ontological wavering, of the national subject. It is important to emphasize once again that the national other qua stranger, which is often portrayed in the national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists through a fantasy-frame of the burlesque, is not seen as a symptomatic figure of the comic adversary, but rather in a Schmittian manner - as a more or less tragic embodiment of the purportedly ever-present and necessary ethnic rivalry: “[the national] enemy…is…the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient that he [or she] is, in a specifically intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him [or her] are possible.”

This dynamic is especially apparent in the image of the Israeli Jew promoted in the national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists. As I briefly demonstrated in the beginning of this chapter, Russian neo-fascists praise the strong national spirit of the Jews. This, however, does not stop the former from expressing distrust of the latter, pointing to a purported defect in the Jewish national character: “the Yid is Yid because he can deceive a goy without a twinge of conscience.” Similarly, Russian neo-fascists express indignation with a comparatively successful incorporation of the motif of suffering into Jewish national narratives: “there is no other craft in which the Jews put in so much effort, passion, hypocrisy than crafting lies about the hardships, persecution, abuses, oppression, discrimination, humiliation they went through.” Considering the prominence of elegy in the Russian neo-fascist national fantasy, which I explore below, such resentment is the legacy of imaginary rivalry and paranoid aggression that rose up from an almost simultaneous recognition and misrecognition of the Russian self in an image of the Jewish other.

214 Schmitt 27.
216 Popov n.pag.
Russian neo-fascists point out that the national stranger is not to be judged on the merit of its values if they are considered in isolation. This sentiment stems from the idea of contextual, rather than structural relativity of the national subject’s desire. Unlike Lacan, who argues that the mysterious objet a serves an unyielding link connecting the desire of the subject with the that of the Other, which is demonstrated in the bewildering question “Che vuoi?”, Russian neo-fascists claim to ignore even the most aggressive nationalist agenda pursued by the national strange, as long as it does not hinder domestic and international ambitions of Russia and ethnic Russians: “There are no universal human morals. And that is why it is not up to the nationalist to become outraged with the morals of other nations; one must take into account the particular nature of those morals and, based on that, one can build relationships with others or refuse to do it entirely.”

But as soon as political and cultural objectives of other ethnic groups and nations collide with the supposed national interests of ethnic Russians and the geopolitical goals of Russia, admiration then immediately transforms into contempt expressed in caricature: for instance, in its “derisive” attempts to counter Russia, Estonia is ridiculed as “a geographic dwarf.” In short, for Russian neo-fascists, who unwittingly or knowingly, but in either way misguidedly, build their worldview consonantly with Schmitt’s theory of the political, geopolitics rather than ethical considerations governs the actions of nations: for Russian neo-fascists the nation and “the phenomenon of the political can be understood only in the context of the ever present possibility of the friend-and-enemy grouping, regardless of the aspects which this possibility implies for morality, aesthetics, and economics.”

In the supposed absence of the universal ethical system and by extension common standards for international law, Russian neo-fascists understand world politics as a violent,

---

217 Demushkin n.pag.
218 Ilyin n.pag.
219 Schmitt 35.
tragic, but thoroughly “natural” struggle for power and resources available in certain territories in abundance. From a Lacanian point of view, to think of the political in biological terms is to reduce the desire to enjoy the national fullness to the need to have access to the purportedly vital resources, that is, to pass off the Symbolic as the Real, while the latter is inaccessible to the human being so far as it is unmediated. This is an inherently tragic position. Instead, an ethically responsible act would consist in making such substitution transparent.

Just as in the rationality behind the Nazi’s atrocities, the national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists at first glance seems to rest on the ethically void principles of Realpolitik and Geopolitik and gives paramount priority to assuring self-preservation in the most effective way. It is also peculiar that the only feature that separates the belief in the priority of the nation’s interests from the Western idea of self-centered individualism, which, according to Russian neo-fascists, promotes nothing but “selfish ‘consumer society’,” is an opposition between goals of a collective subject and interests of an individual actor; in either case the subject, be it a nation or a citizen, is considered as “an egoistic, rational, utility maximizer.”

The well-being of the Russian nation, however, does not only overweight concerns of national others, but also trumps the individual interests of each ethnic Russian: in a somewhat masochistic fashion ethnic Russians are also expected to see themselves in a strictly utilitarian light – as means to further purportedly suprahuman objectives, the certain grand mission of the nation. Such juxtaposition of the collective and the individual, as I mentioned in Chapter Three, highlights the incompatibility between the Russian religiously inspired model of the supposed innate harmony among people, or sobornost (which lies at the very foundation of Russian ethnic ideal espoused by Russian neo-fascists) and the Western ideal of active civic engagement in

---

220 Sablin n.pag.; Mueller 23.
political governance, rather than supporting the assumption of the difference between the purported spirituality, or otherworldliness, of Russians and the ascribed materialism of the West.

While arguing that it is impossible to compare various national values and thereby speak of the common good, Russian neo-fascists nevertheless reject the chaotic and axiologically undifferentiated model of the world that is ruled by means of brute force for the sake of merely biological survival. This, as I pointed out above, transpires in the burlesque confusion neo-fascists experience toward vigorous nationalist endeavors of national others, as well as estranged “European brothers.” Just as the Soviet vision of the Russian nation as “the first among equals” functioned merely as a cautious way to insist on the privileged status of ethnic Russians in the USSR, so do Russian neo-fascists speak of the superiority of the Russian idea over all other national visions without at the same time playing down the idea that the world necessarily involves racial and national division, as well as cooperation. Russian neo-fascists, for example, acknowledge that “[they] have no choice but to become cynics, without, however, giving up on the idea of the European [white] unity. The fact is that this unity will be such as we want it to see.” Such self-defined cynicism, manifested in an attitude of burlesque ambivalence, can be further explored by looking into how Russian neo-fascists explain the origins and the nature of the nation.

Against the initial impression that one might get from the rhetoric of struggle and survival, Russian neo-fascists renounce the model of the world organized by the laws of pure biology and thus permeated with “racial corruption,” when “superior and inferior races get

---

221 See Leontyev.
222 “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.
223 “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.
224 Although Russian neo-fascists are guided by the interests of their nation in particular and the white race in general, they are not properly cynical, since their national fantasy is founded on the belief in the bio-spiritual superiority of the Russian nation.
‘appointed’ at a whim of the currently strongest and the most powerful [racial/national] element.”  

Such opportunistic biological hierarchy is nothing other than “fascism in the worst sense of the word (which is far from being a univocal concept).” From this angle Russian neo-fascists denounce Nazism, as well as “Jewish fascism” and Caucasian “fascis[m],” noting that “[w]hen the Russian people slide into poverty and die off, while [another] nation thrives, grows big and fat at the expense of the former, this is…fascism.” Rather than differentiating among biologically stronger or weaker “natural races” (just like animals divide in predators and their prey), Russian neo-fascists turn to the authority of biblical texts and “Christian Orthodox anthropology“ to be able to speak of races in terms of their “spiritual,” “psychic” differences. Race is explained as a “bio-informational” entity, “a transitory form between matter and spirit.” The sought-after strength and authority of Russia, which Russian neo-fascists discern not only in the country’s vast territory and abundant natural resources, but also in the supposed national character, and which make up the country’s essence, or the objet a, are still considered to be a manifestation of the nation’s Real, rather than a product of rhetorical signification of the historical contingency of the national subject’s traumatic encounter with the Real.

Before they divided in nations, presumably, at the time of the biblical Fall, people arguably existed as one “godlike, divine race,” as equal “on the axiological scale of spirit and race.” The hierarchy of racial and national values was then established and reinforced in the course of historical development of nations, albeit “not [as] a result of good or bad environment, but [in relation to] inherited qualities of certain blood and race.” Some “bio-spiritually”

---

225 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
226 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
227 Gavriil Popov n.pag.; Martinovich n. pag.
228 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
229 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
230 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.; Leontyev n.pag. See also “Denunciation.”
231 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
superior nations, including ethnic Russians, can supposedly trace their origins to Japheth, one of Noah’s sons, and his descendant, who were “able to return to their absolute purity,” while others further sank into sin and bestiality.232 While this argumentative move - to insist on a quasi-spiritual component to the supposedly natural struggle for power and resources - may not be totally expected, its value, however, is easy to grasp. As Russia has to put up with the current technological and economic superiority of the West, Russian neo-fascists attempt to stake out a claim to the nation’s spirituality as something that cannot be more or less objectively evaluated, although it purportedly originates in the Real.

In addition to the “racial corruption” that arguably incites fascism, in the opinion of Russian neo-fascists, the principles of humanism, pacifism and tolerance, associated with liberal democracy, Western civic nationalism (as opposed to “true,” Russky political or civic nationalism) and the secular state, are interpreted as “insensitivity to otherness,” or the inability of the national subject to attune to the voice of the national other. This too leads to factual inequality and, as a result, outright fascism.233 Thus, as we can see, Russian neo-fascists continue to insist on the tragic negativity, understood in terms of the national subject’s opposition to its particular national others, rather than the structural negativity of lack.

Refusing to accept the thesis of “racial nihilism [understood as] an antiscientific affirmation of absolute equivalence, absolute equality of potential, absolute unification of people of all races and ethnicities,” Russian neo-fascists argue that “[t]o see essentially unequal [national subjects] as formally equal...means to create terrible actual inequality. How do you image the formal equality and cohabitation of wolves and sheep, foxes and chickens, elephants

---

232 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag. See also Krylov, “Migrantocracy.”
233 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
and whales? Is tolerance…possible in the first two, as well as the third, cases? To clarify their total rejection of the ideas of inborn equality and tolerance, Russian neo-fascists provide a hypothetical example:

Imagine, for example, there are two groups of people equal in size on an uninhabited island; they are ethnic Russian and Chechens. You place them together and give them equal rights. After a while you are surprised (if you do not believe in raceology) to see ethnic slavery! Most ethnic Russians…(owing to their natural predisposition) will engage in constructive labor. Most Chechens—similarly owing to their predisposition—will at once join gangs, procure weapons and attack ethnic Russians, who have created something that can be taken away.  

Based on this logic Russian neo-fascists explain the current hegemony, or mastery, of the U.S.: the latter is deemed to be nothing but a bully, which hides its imperialism behind “the faceless ‘will of world society’” and “abstract, universal norms of international law [that] concea[l] and mystif[y] particular international relations of domination and submission.” This arguably allows Russian neo-fascists to talk about American “legal fascism,” which reveals itself in “the repressive dialectic of disposition and assumption of sovereign rights of other countries” by the U.S. Moreover, lulled into complacency by “the mysticism of commodity fetishism” (which Russian neo-fascists discern in practices of tolerance, pacifism, liberalism, civic and secular

---

234 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
235 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
236 Von Kreiter n.pag.
237 Von Kreiter n.pag.
reason), Europe arguably lost the sight of its objet a - true ethno-religious values as an expression of the (quasi-)-genetic, “bio-informational” code of white European nations.\textsuperscript{238}

Unlike Europeans, who are purportedly no longer able to think critically and thus to fight with the godless politics of world oligarchy (since “throughout history critical rationality has been anti-American rationality”), ethnic Russians boast of well-developed critical faculty, which arguably has been “a part of [ethnic Russian] national identity,” or, more precisely, Russky political nationalism.\textsuperscript{239} The appeal of Russian neo-fascists to critical thinking is, however, as valid as the idea of “civic” solidarity of ethnic Russians, that is, the odd coalescence of ethnic and civic nationalisms, both of which are misconstrued by Russian neo-fascists and presented as the “true” Russian nationalism.

In general any meaningful references to reason and freedom, which cannot exist one without the other, are, as I explain later, in the grotesque contrast to the traditional Russian concept of sobornost, which promotes a pious belief in truth that is given and immutable.

Russian neo-fascists are certain that the “[Russian] patriot must be conservative,” and that no one can “come up with [national values] on their own, since such arbitrariness is a prerogative of those who disregard tradition or intend to destroy and sweep it away.”\textsuperscript{240} Finally, in the manner reminiscent of Walter Lippmann’s argument for technocracies, where governments are guided by “disinterested expert[s]” who “[make] the unseen facts intelligible to those who have to make the decisions,” presenting them with “a valid picture of the environment,” Russian neo-fascists insist that:

It is impossible to be part-time political thinkers or ideologues. That is why only those who constantly produce political ideas must release them to public. All

\textsuperscript{238} Von Kreiter n.pag.; Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{239} Von Kreitor n.pag.; Krylov, “Migrantocracy” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{240} Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
others may experience those ideas in a variety of formats: from an uncritical emotional response to an opportunity to comprehend fairly complex, but compact doctrines.\textsuperscript{241}

This vision of public rationality, however, is not only largely uncritical and thoroughly undemocratic, but also misguided in a sense that neither wholly disinterested nor perfectly truthful knowledge is within the reach of an expect or, for that matter, any other human being. In short, it is openly tragic.

By supposedly being both guardians of Russian traditional values and in the vanguard of modern political struggle for the freedoms and rights of ethnic Russians, Russian neo-fascists refuse “to trade on national interests, turning them into private profit.”\textsuperscript{242} In place of pacifism, tolerance and liberal democracy, they promote the Russian ideal of “true equality that draws on divine justice” and can be attained only in war, through victory and suffering.\textsuperscript{243} In war the nation is supposedly able to prove its role of a resolute defender of “the True Church, the Church that is bellicose, that never compromises with the evil, never capitulates to it.”\textsuperscript{244} Any military loss in Russian history, as well as the gaping economical and technological lag of the country then is conceived in a way that is consonant with the overall apocalyptic quality of fascist fantasy - as a temporary and unfair situation, rather than a defeat. Since what is at stake is the very existence of the nation and the whole race, losing is never an option. Besides, as I noted above, the worth of the nation as a bio-spiritual construct is purportedly assessed not only by its physical and material strength, but also by its spiritual quality.\textsuperscript{245} This vision, however, does not underplay the gravity of adversity by explaining any unfortunate situation, as I will demonstrate

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{241} Lippmann 346, 33, 373.
\textsuperscript{242} Saveliev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
\textsuperscript{243} Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{244} Amvrosiy n.pag. See also “Mystic National Socialism.”
\textsuperscript{245} I discuss this as a tragically marked epic below.
\end{flushright}
below, in tragically epic terms. Ethnic Russians, as neo-fascists further warn, must still be ready
to fight, and even “want and like to fight,” “to be…a militarized society.”

It is owing to such perpetual and “pragmatic militarism [coupled with] thoughtful patriotism” and galvanized by
“the Great Victory” over Nazism, that ethnic Russians can arguably claim Russia’s authority in
the world.

Every Russian victory is perceived in a conspiratorial fashion as just another
confirmation of Russia’s power, as well as righteousness, because Russians choose “the Eternal
Destiny of Heroes – the Path of the Ancestors, [over] the destiny of the unworthy – the
momentary pleasure of dabbling in the mud of material prosperity.”

The ability to go heroically to the very end - “without ‘pity’ for someone or ‘as in duty bound’, but because
[fascists] feel the responsibility to do good“ - is the destiny of the “true” Russian hero. This
apocalyptically inspired epic attitude is, however, far from a humble vision of the nation as
heroic – as the one wrestling its tragic fantasy, rather than fighting national others. The victory in
the Great Patriotic War in the national narrative in question is portrayed as a defeat of another
national enemy, rather than a triumph over a radically tragic fantasy. It is peculiar that Russian
neo-fascists do not only praise the Russians who protected Russia from Nazi Germany, but also,
as I mention below, those Russians who, originally being a part of the anti-Bolshevik coalition,
fought the Soviet regime on the side of the Axis powers.

What matters to Russian neo-fascists is only whether ethnic Russians are able to preserve
the nation, to stand up for its supposedly natural rights and ultimately to complete “the God-
given special mission” – to assure “a continuation of Russian History ushering the Russian

---

246 Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
247 Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
248 Remizov n.pag.; “The Oath” n.pag.
249 Grott n.pag.
nation and the world in a new [great] epoch of national, spiritual and state life of the Russia-to-come.”

Fighting for the glorious future of the Russian nation and subsequently, as Russian neo-fascists insist, for that of Europe and even the whole world is explained by the purported Russian desire to protect the “real freedoms,...real culture and...real life standards” of “White Europe,” and “to revive the Truth and the Beauty [of the White Ideas] on the Earth.”

Whereas Russian neo-fascists maintain that “[c]elebrating war heroes must be more important than mourning war victims,” it is an attitude of the both necessary and unfair suffering of ethnic Russians that gives the tragically marked epic fantasy-frame its appeal. The more there is suffering, there bigger is victory. As I noted in Chapter Three, the idea of religious ascetic sacrifice underpins Russian national identity as it has been renegotiated through the ages. Just as with many Russian cultural and political figures, from the nineteenth-century Russian writer and proponent of pan-Slavism Dostoyevsky to Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin (one of most vocal and loyal representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church), Russian neo-fascists welcome misfortune and misery, because “suffering will bring those who got used to living peacefully, calmly and comfortably [or, in other words, godlessly.] back to their senses.”

Such cleansing suffering is bequeathed by the ruthless ethno-religious authority – the true national leader – and/or as a promise of Russia’s greatness, and as such is always “greeted with understanding and support” by Russian people.

Although self-inflicted, such suffering is often portrayed as caused by national enemies, the multitude of which aspires to destroy Russia by stripping ethnic Russians of their supposedly...

---

250 Leontyev n.pag.; Grott n.pag.
251 Grott n.pag.; “National Revolutionary Alternative” n.pag.; “Russian Nationalists’ Address’ n.pag.; Also see Demushkin.
252 Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
253 “Is There a Balance” n.pag.
254 Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
birth-given rights and turning them into “a dismal silent herd.”

Pointing to the present economic, demographic crises in Russia, as well as recalling the supposed treatment of ethnic Russians as “cannon fodder [during the Second World War] and draught cattle” in “[the great] construction projects of communism,” in addition to the most recent “persecution[s]” in former Soviet republics (including the Baltic states, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine), Russian neo-fascist talk about no less than “Russian Holocaust.”

Said otherwise, Russian neo-fascists adopted the tragically marked elegiac national fantasy-frame of apocalyptic significance, when the national subject is perceived as unjustly discriminated against by national enemies in the East and the West, “enslaved” by the impostor government - “Putin’s thief junta” - and further coached into “the myth about the innate ‘guilt’ of ethnic Russians” for their “conscious patriotism.”

Contrary to Nashi’s evaluation of Russia’s current position, as I show in Chapter Five, Russian neo-fascists are adamant that the situation is close to being hopeless.

Russia neo-fascists therefore believe that their candidly tragic actions are a truly defensive response: “if adequate people in droves approve inadequate actions, it means that the problem is not them, but in their living conditions.”

The Kondopoga ethnic clashes, the Russian Marches, and the Manezh Square racial riots thereby are all deemed to be warranted reactions of ethnic Russians as true victims of “ethnic terror.”

As neo-fascists emphasize, those events are not manifestations of blind xenophobia; they do not rise from petty grievances or irrational, “narrow-minded revenge,” “although those emotions…serve as a sign of the rationally apprehended truth.”

---

255 “Tolerats” n.pag.
256 Susov n. pag.; Popov n.pag.; Sablin n.pag. Also see Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
257 “Organize” n. pag.; Susov n. pag.; Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
258 Sokolov-Mitrich n.pag.
259 “Putin’s Plan” n.pag.
260 “Volunteering” n.pag.; Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
Russian ethnic nationalism is then considered to be a politically meaningful expression of “the very biology” of the Russian nation. From this angle, the Russian Marches, as Russian neo-fascists stress, must be regarded as exceptionally significant events, a mode of physical enactment of Russianness, “a simple language that even animals can understand. Heavy steps and a loud voice mean strength and bravery. Light steps and a whisper indicate weakness and cowardice.” The Russian Marches then arguably become an opportunity for ethnic Russians to “reclaim [their] lands just by marching on them together.” As such the annual Russian March is not “a folk festival,” but “a triumph of democracy,” “ethnic Russians’ demand for a civil society,” a “Russian Tahrir.”

Drawing a parallel with large-scale civil protests in Egypt in 2011, neo-fascists position themselves as those who defend the freedoms and rights of ethnic Russians, and fight Putin’s regime of “total deideologized dictatorship,” democratic “farce and open profanity.” “[Russian] (‘national’) democracy” is offered as the best alternative to Western democracy, since the latter functions only as “a mechanism of introducing ‘right’ ideas” that necessarily coincide with the interests of the U.S. It is noteworthy that for Russian neo-fascists the ultimate truth corresponds exclusively with the interests of ethnic Russians both at home and abroad. But since, as Russian neo-fascists point out, world politics cannot be reduced to a mere instinctual fight for physical survival, and some nations can rightfully claim their spiritual authority over others, the

---

261 Krylov, “Offensive” n.pag. On occasion Russian neo-fascists seem to accentuate either the biological component or the spiritual element in the supposed bio-spiritual make-up of the nation.
264 “About the Russian March” n. pag.; “Russian March Will Be Modernized” n.pag.; “Neofeudalism” n.pag.
265 “Ten Riot Police Buses” n.pag.; Onegin n.pag. One of the most notable political demands of the Russian March organizers is to revoke Article 282 on extremism - the only law hate crimes can be prosecuted under in Russia.
266 Yeliseyev, “Real Democracy” n.pag.; Sokolov-Mitrich n.pag.
geopolitical interests of Russia as a bio-spiritually superior people take precedence over those of the U.S.

The analysis of the psycho-rhetorical narrative of Russian neo-fascists has shown so far that their national fantasy bears a profoundly tragic attitude, manifested in properly tragic, burlesque, epic and elegiac frames. The world is perceived in apocalyptic terms: as currently “sinking into evil” and thus in dire need of salvation, which can only be achieved if one follows “the canons of uncompromising Orthodoxy of the early Middle Ages, unsullied with…various humanistic, ‘universal human’ interpretations.”267 What also transpires is that the national fantasy in question is thoroughly grotesque in the sense that it is built around apparent logical and ideological incongruity, despite its conspiratorial bid for coherence.

Russian neo-fascists, as I demonstrated above, insist that nations prosper in war, but perish in peace; that true equality and justice are attainable only if one follows the idea of racial and spiritual superiority of some nations over others; that Russia needs civil society and critically minded people while at the same time the tradition of the Russian idea presupposes a voluntary surrender of individual interests and opinions in exchange for a feeling of belonging to a great nation; that national aspirations of ethnic Russians must be understood in oxymoronically sounding terms of political biology and biologically driven civic nationalism; that the nation’s suffering is imperative, but unjust; and finally, that liberal democracy is in fact fascist, whereas Russian neo-fascism is an example of true democracy. The later claim is of special importance in this work and so it requires a slightly more focused attention.

Aware of the historical stigma of fascism and how “in the country that defeated fascism, playing a cool Arian can only bring disgrace,” Russian neo-fascists meet with indignation any

267 Amvrosiy n.pag.; “Mystic National Socialism” n.pag.
accusations of fascism. They keep insisting that “nobody among [them] considers oneself a fascist,” that there is no such phenomenon as Russian fascism, instead “there is a big country with a big problem which we must urgently solve.” Playing with words, all Russian neo-fascists want is to disassociate themselves from the politics of Nazi Germany and the Nazis’ plan to exterminate and enslave ethnic Russians, Russian neo-fascists, since the former claim to do exactly opposite. Thus Russian neo-fascists note that one can almost automatically assume the anti-fascist position of ethnic Russians: “fascists considered ethnic Russians pigs and subhumans. [If I call myself fascist, it means] that I have to hate myself in the first place.”

Moreover, the Nazi ideology is portrayed as perversion or corruption of fascism, or even as “an anti-Christian, satanic movement, [which] was a logical extension of principles of the Judeo-Masonic civilization aspiring to establish ‘a new world order’.”

Simultaneously in the psycho-rhetorical narrative of Russian neo-fascists one can stumble upon the most clearly voiced conviction that fascism (but not Nazism) is a doctrine of “Truth and Beauty on the Earth” and a voluntary desire or an innate “responsibility to do good,” inspired by the moral authority and the innate strength of ethnic Russians as a superior bio-spiritual nation. As such, Russian neo-fascists add, fascism (in a supposedly “good” sense of the word) complement the very essence of Russianness:

The fascist history of medieval Russia does not only organically link our modern Russian Fascist Movement with the history of the Russian state, but is a

---

268 Benediktov, “Nationalism” n.pag.
269 Benediktov, “Nationalism” n.pag.; Sokolov-Mitrich n.pag.
270 “We Stopped” n.pag.
271 Platonov n.pag.
272 Grott n. pag.
direct source of Russian fascist ideology, its religious and moral nature, its deeply national shape, its spirituality…and its state regime and political practices….⁹²⁷³

Hoping to give fascism a distinctly positive, that is, Russian meaning, Russian neo-fascists assert that the “ominous and unattractive image” of fascism is just a tool that the state and politicians use to fight political opponents or “anything that in the slightest degree differs from liberal discourse.”⁹²⁷⁴ Such tactics, as they warn, are likely to backfire, because by calling a “true” patriot “fascist,” that is, by pushing for an association between Russian “conscious patriotism” and fascism, one in effect “rehabilitate[s] the world ‘fascist’.”⁹²⁷⁵

Based on what emerged in the chapter so far, one may conclude that both fascism (more specifically, what Russian neo-fascists see as “good,” “pristine” fascism) and anti-fascism (as antithetical to “corrupted” fascism) correlate with loyalty to Russian national interests and a willingness to fight Russia’s national enemies. It also becomes obvious that such grotesque attitude possesses a resolutely tragic valence. Instead of denouncing the radically tragic ideology of fascism, Russian neo-fascists celebrate the victory over just another national enemy: this victory is simply “a reminder of the triumph that inspires us for new victories” and “national solidarity that makes our nation invincible.”⁹²⁷⁶

While the symptomatic, somewhat one-dimensional reading of the national imaginary shows that Russian neo-fascists negotiate the meaning of Russianness by appealing to the largely tragic “logic of Russian history,” including the purportedly bellicose legacy of Russia’s victory over Nazi Germany, it remains hard to explain how the tragic national fantasy, especially when rendered in a peculiarly grotesque, conspiratorial form, allows Russian neo-fascists to gain the

---

²⁷³ Grott n. pag.
²⁷⁴ Benediktov, “Nationalism” n.pag.
²⁷⁶ Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
upper hand in an ideological face-off with the West, which alternatively claims the comic legacy of anti-fascism as it is expressed in the principles of liberal democracy. To explain how Russian neo-fascists set their Russian idea against the Western liberal discourse, while at the same time speaking in terms of the Western national other, I suggest moving the further analysis into the dimension of the Symbolic.

4.5 The Triumph of the Symbolic Master

Unlike the analysis of the Imaginary, which offers an insight in how the national subject sees national others and thus itself, the reading of the Symbolic, permits us to understand why the national subject invests in particular images. To answer the second question in the most general way it would be enough to say that, by securing certain discursive positions in relation to national others, the national subject attempts, albeit in an unconscious manner, to become a subject without lack. Bearing this in mind, a psycho-rhetorical reading of national fantasy in its symbolic dimension, nevertheless, must maintain a degree of specificity to ensure analytically rigorous findings. In other words, when exploring the Symbolic, rhetoricians seek to understand why certain national images in particular cultural and socio-political contexts are able to fill in the lack more affectively (and thus effectively).\textsuperscript{277}

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the Symbolic is an unconscious register of continuously established signifier-to-signifier correlations that structure the subject’s relationships with others, manifested in certain imaginary commitments. Those images can be said, albeit with certain reservations, to comprise individual, distinct national \textit{connaissance}, or conscious knowledge. On

\textsuperscript{277} From a Lacanian point of view, a particular fantasy is appealing, or effective, if it is able to bring the national subject into a state of great affective fulfillment, no matter how momentary and illusory it always is.
the other hand, the Symbolic is what Lacan describes as the (unconscious) language of the Other, in sense that it “is located outside of man,” that it is intersubjective.  

278 Considering the increasingly globalized modern world, nations and thus their national narratives do not exist in isolation from each other or the dominant global discursive structure. They are attached to each other on the Symbolic level – by signifiers that, just like “links by which a necklace firmly hooks onto a link of another necklace made of links,” allow for reciprocal encroachment of national symbolic networks.  

279 Judging by signifiers prevalent in the symbolic reservoir of the national fantasy, it is possible to say that for Russian neo-fascists the West becomes the privileged Other. Although the resolute national character of Eastern “barbarians,” as well as their unshakable fidelity to traditions, inspires and intrigues Russian neo-fascists, for the latter find themselves captivated by the desire of the West to a far greater degree. In fact, it is obvious on the most immediate level: Russian neo-fascists prefer to speak the language of their Western other – the language of progress, rationality, democracy (although only when it is beneficial to them). This is telling, especially in the context of Russia’s enduring aspiration to distance itself from the image of backwardness most commonly ascribed to Russia in the West, the civilization potential of which the country has long aspired to match. By passing that image on non-Slavic and non-Christian nations in the East, Russian neo-fascists attempt to prove the worth of ethnic Russians as an “urban, European, civilized, fairly humane, kind, non-aggressive [nation, which, nevertheless,] has its national interests” and ready to defend them in war.  

280 Such appeals to the supposedly civil and peace-loving Russian nature seem to be at variance with the generally bellicose rhetoric of neo-fascists only if one ignores the endeavor of Russian neo-fascists to merge the civic and

280 Kholmogorov n.pag.
ethnic forms of nationalism into the “true” Russian nationalism as a rationally apprehended idea of ethnic solidarity.

It is also possible to assume that ethnic Russians, as they are portrayed in the national fantasy in question, are placid only relatively – as compared with the purported aggressive tribal barbarism of nations in the East. Indeed, the Russian national subject sees itself vis-à-vis its Eastern and Western national others differently: in opposition to the supposedly irrational barbarism of the East, Russia is depicted as an example of rational civility, while Russia’s spirituality is emphasized against Western pragmatism. The process of Russian national identity negotiation then can be better understood from the angle of discursive positionality - as a search for the objet a of the Russian nation in the symbolic space between the East and the West, or tradition and modernity.

The world, as it exists in the national fantasy of Russian neo-fascists, is a reality of competing Masters– partisan discourses of ethnic national, or “bio-informational” values, among which ethnic Russians assert, through courage and suffering, their supposed superiority. However, in Lacan’s words, “the loser must not perish”: by setting ethnic nationalisms against the Russian kind, Russian neo-fascists do not wish to eliminate the national other. As they insist, only in the presence of the national stranger is the Russian nation capable of seeing itself as such. This knowledge, however, is not that of the Analyst (a \( \frac{a}{S2} \rightarrow \frac{s}{S1} \)), who understands (S2) that the subject’s radical uncertainty (a) prompts the national subject to invest in the image of the national other. Instead, this is the obscene certitude of the Master (\( \frac{S1}{s} \rightarrow \frac{S2}{a} \)): the belief in its absolute knowledge and thus power to impose its will on others.

281 Sadovnikov-Fedotov, “Genetics” n.pag.
As a fantasmatic vision, the reality of competing masters does not exist, since such structure, as Lacan points out, “[is missing] a bond that would keep the society of masters together”: the Master always needs its Slave. By opposing the Master’s discourse of Russian nationalism to what they see as the Master’s discourse of purported tribal barbarism of the East, Russian neo-fascists in fact ascribe the position of the Slave to their Eastern national other. Therefore, rather than by taking a place in a hierarchy of national values that ethnic Russians arguably head, the Eastern national other is forced to assume an inferior position toward the Russian nation by trading its Master’s discourse, or its sovereign right, its national liberty, for a life of the symbolic slave. Having depicted the Eastern national other as aggressive and backward, as the other who needs to be pacified and “introduced…into world civilization by association with the Russian World,” Russian neo-fascists refuse to release non-Slavic ethnic minorities and former Soviet republics from Russia’s imperial embrace. Only through such a procedure can the Russian national subject maintain the desired mandate of the absolute Master, yet merely until it starts to experience its own powerlessness, or subjective uncertainty, again.

According to Lacan, the Master (as well as the subject in any symbolic position) never gets to enjoy itself fully, since “[t]he satisfaction of human desire is…mediated by the other’s desire and labor.” In other words, the Master/Slave dialectic in Lacan’s psychoanalysis is nothing other but the basic mechanism of subjectivity production: the national subject gets to know itself only in relation to the national other; but since the latter is also lacking, or it is never what it seems or says, it is ultimately unable to become a stable base point in the national subject’s search for subjective certitude. As a result, the presence of the national other will always cause anxiety. This is the reason why Russian neo-fascists suspect that the purportedly

284 Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
primitive and barbaric Eastern national other always enjoys itself more: it seems to observe its traditions and the way of life despite even the most adverse circumstances, while ethnic Russians, as Russian neo-fascists occasionally admit, have a hard time to stand united behind one national idea.

Whereas the “threat” coming from the East is perceived predominantly in terms of “pollution” of ethnic Russians by “substandard blood,” the “danger” from the West, more specifically the modern Western form of democracy, is understood on the level of ideas that arguably “shake the foundations of our community, our nation.” It is especially peculiar then that non-ethnic Russian groups and nations in what in Russia is most commonly understood as the East are regarded as Russia’s ideological enemies, who defend their own national identities and national cultures, while the West, more specifically, world oligarchy or world government, is viewed as a non-ideological adversary guided by mere “colonialist utilitarian considerations.” In other words, unlike the supposedly impassioned struggle for national liberation carried out by ethnic Russians, as well as other ethnic groups and nations in the East, the U.S. and countries of Western Europe got “an ideological virus with which world oligarchy attempts to bear down the resistance of its opponents.” This virus, according to Russian neo-fascists, has led to “the degradation of civilized nations,” which purportedly lost their national essence, or, said otherwise, their object a, just to replace it with “the rootless and egoistic ‘consumer[ism]’ ridden with “awful vices.” In other words, in the view of Russian neo-

---

286 See Sokolov-Mitrich. Leaders of the neo-fascist organizations, for example, admit that “modern Russian nationalists (who are, as a rule, the children of the Soviet system) are walking into various directions by taking the coherent [nationalist philosophy] apart into the elements they like,” such as anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism, patriotism, and autocracy. “Mystic National Socialism” n.pag.
287 Leontyev n.pag.; Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
288 Nazarov n.pag.
289 Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
290 Sablin n.pag.; Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
fascists, national ideology is viable only when it is firmly established in the Real of the national subject – its “bio-informational” code.

Unlike the national other in the East, the Western national enemy, or the so-called world government (which Russian neo-fascists also distinguish from the Western national stranger – estranged “European brothers”), is ascribed the position of the cynical bureaucrat:

There is…the worldview of bureaucracy. It tends to cooperate with oligarchy and therefore to profess “democratic values.” Besides, it owns a certain economic center that allows making profit and faking up popular support, so nobody could catch corrupt officials and traitors red-handed. Bureaucracy does not stand for any idea. By means of propaganda it creates an illusory perspective of “modernization” and “political competition.”

While the narrative of a cynic must be read in terms of the discourse of the obsessive, Russian neo-fascists associate cynicism with the supposedly non-political, non-ideological discourse of the University. Russian neo-fascists decidedly contrapose the value of ethnic nationalism to the Western model of liberal democracy, which “the…Judeo-Masonic [corporate] government” and oligarchy purportedly attempt to hard sell to sovereign nations under the banner of globalization and progress: “Many will say that it does not matter who is in charge. The most important thing is prosperity. Western countries, for example, prosper, and it means that democracy lived up to expectations.”

Russian neo-fascists are adamant that such logic is problematic and precarious. First, they insist that high living standards in the West cannot be attributed to technological modernization and its “political correlate” - democracy, but are tied to “the exploitation of underdeveloped

---

291 “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.; Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
292 Yeliseyev, “Real Democracy” n.pag.
countries – colonies and semi-colonies” by the West. Further, Russian neo-fascists see modern Western democracy as simply an attempt to conceal the ultimate motive of global profiteering. Such a material motive, as Russian neo-fascists stress, characterizes the Western national enemy as a cynical hypocrite.

As a discourse of universal values, democracy is, in the view of Russian neo-fascists, a stillborn social framework, since it supposedly lacks partisan, ideological conviction, which arguably derives strength from the Real, that is, the biological quality of the nation as the very element that assures a strong social bond among people. For Russian neo-fascists such social link presents itself as an unconditional, yet purportedly rational belief in the exclusiveness of one’s nation as the complementarity of the national body and the national character. Further, the West’s cosmopolitan democracy project is also arguably apolitical, since it is indifferent to national interests. It is not surprising then that Russian neo-fascists feel no qualms about speaking the language of Western liberal democracy, when they insist on the rights and freedoms of ethnic Russians: after all, the discourse of democracy is, as they have it, entirely formal, without any ideologically significant content, and as such can function in almost any political context. Having conceived of Western liberal democracy as a non-ideological and formal project, Russian neo-fascists conclude, “there is no reason to look up to the decaying model of the West.”

It does not mean, however, that any discourse that lays claims to objectivity and universality is a cynical symbolic construct that revolves around nothing but the prospect of gain and venal practices, just as it does not mean that the discourse of bureaucracy is necessarily

---

293 Yeliseyev, “Real Democracy” n.pag.
294 As I explained in Chapter Two, the University’s discourse can function as a discourse of bureaucracy and a discourse of democracy. Both are ideological constructs, since they (just as human reality in general) are founded by repressing the fundamental knowledge (savoir) of lack.
295 Sablin n.pag.
apolitical and cynical. Neither does this structural conjunction of the particular and the universal
whittle away the ethical ideal and political significance of comic melancholy advocated from a
position of universality in the discourse of liberal democracy.

The Western national enemy is not apolitical, formal or cynical just because, as Russian
neo-fascists insist, it appeals to universal, extra-national beliefs: the West instead simply
functions, as I explicated in Chapter Three, as an agent of the Discourse of the University. To
describe the liberal democratic narrative as a cynical project, conversely, constitutes an attitude
of cynical disbelief, which is still, as I noted in Chapter Two, an ideological and tragic construct.
Indeed, Russian neo-fascists engage the discourse of the Hysteric in its obsessive form, which
corresponds with a symbolic structure of the cynic: they point to the cynical distance between
universal claims and particular interests of the West, while at the same time arguing that the
Russian “truth” is the truth of the whole white race.

By revealing the purported impotence of the master signifier of liberal democracy to
produce a meaningful engagement of people, Russian neo-fascists – as the revolutionary agent of
the properly Hysteric’s discourse – protest the West’s liberal, pluralistic model of socio-political
life vigorously. Such contention, regrettably, does not lead anywhere in the direction of the
inherently comic discourse of the Analyst, thus depriving the Russian national subject from an
opportunity to engage in a sober, thoughtful critique of excesses that are no doubt proper to
practices of liberal democracy and global capitalism.

Rather than betting on the discourse of Western liberal democracy, which Russian neo-
fascists adamantly describe as an ideologically hollow and politically listless discourse of
axiological universality, ethnic Russian “patriots” are called on to fill “the ideas of freedom and
justice, human dignity and social justice, democracy and the rule-of-the-law state,” “the ideas
that have been corrupted by opponents with our own – national and traditional – content.”

The true Russian way of life is purportedly inspired by the principle of organic national unity – sobornost, and grounded in “monarchy and real (‘national’) democracy” (which arguably participate in a symbiotic relationship), “national capitalism,” as well as the idea that ethnic Russians are not only bound by blood, but are also united by common political interests – the rights and freedoms of ethnic Russians, which purportedly outweighs the rights and freedoms of other nations due to bio-spiritual superiority of ethnic Russians. The war against Nazi Germany - as just another national enemy of ethnic Russians - arguably revived the traditional “Russian nation-society”: “The Victory is a call for a mature civic position…which is able to repel any assault on our land.”

It is peculiar, that the idea of civic engagement, which is commonly understood as a sphere of an ideological, political negotiation between the state and society, is revolutionized by the hysteric national subject: it is reformulated in terms of a resolute defense of or even a war for, “true” national interests against the nation’s enemies.

Western democracy is treated as a formal, disembodied category – as an entity without an essence, without the discernible, established objet a. The provenance of the latter, according to Russian neo-fascists, is the Master’s Discourse of ethnic nationalism – an uncontested knowledge of the national self. It is this knowledge, this secret that the Russian national subject offers to the West. By placing the Russian national subject into a position of the Hysteric, Russian neo-fascists do not only attempt to mobilize ethnic Russians around “genuinely” Russian values, but also to protest the supposed ideologically depleted and politically defused authority of West, which they set against the ideologically and politically charged authority and strength of ethnic Russians derived from the nation’s bio-spiritual code.

---

296 Savelyev, “To Shape” n.pag.
297 Yeliseyev, “Real Democracy” n.pag.; Khokhryakov n.pag.
298 Leontyev n.pag.; Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.
Further, Russian neo-fascists insist that Russia “[i]n the last battle will be the paragon of Europeanness.” The apocalyptic final fight is apparently the struggle for the future of “White Europe,” as well as the whole world. Following the triumphant and sacrificial legacy of Russia’s victory over Nazi Germany, when “[e]thnic Russians contained the plague [of fascism] begotten only and exclusively by Europe,” and the dissolution of the USSR, when “[the Russians] sacrificed their state sovereignty in order to save other nations of the Continent from the ‘red plague’ epidemic,” Russia is about to save Europe and the world again. This time it is from both racially compromised nations and cynical, pseudo-democratic global forces.

As this chapter approaches its close, it is time to resolve the problem of how, by engaging the nodal point of fascism from within the global discourse of liberal democracy, Russian neo-fascists manage to negotiate what it means to be Russian. First, it is important to recall that the national fantasy offered by Russian neo-fascists is decidedly tragic. As such, it does not break from the way the national idea that has been consistently articulated throughout Russia’s history – as a vision of a xenophobic, anti-Semitic, imperialist, chauvinistic nation that pins it hopes on the strong state at the expense of individual, civil liberties.

The Russian national subject expresses its penchant for tragic mourning in a variety of fantasy-frames. Among tragedy proper, epic, elegy, and the burlesque, the grotesque fantasy-frame is especially prominent: Russian neo-fascists make appeals to “true” democracy and promote an “authentic” model of civil society. However, they do this without any pretense of supporting Western values of democracy, human rights, or political and economic freedoms. While at first sight it may seem that a tragic Russian national subject would simply take advantage of the anti-fascist legacy of the USSR’s participation in the Second World War by

---

299 “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.
300 Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.; “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag.
claiming Russia’s purportedly rightful place within the Western discourse of liberal democracy, the above analysis demonstrates that Russian neo-fascists instead attempt to dismantle the liberal democratic hegemonic structure. They do so by denying the existence of the common good and ethics, in particular, the universally pursued and comically inspired principles of individual liberty and freedoms.

In a striking resemblance to the Soviet notion of morality and ethics, voiced by Vladimir Lenin at the Third All-Russia Congress of the Russian Young Communist League in 1920, Russian neo-fascists insist that the moral and the ethical are necessarily subordinated to national interests: “We reject any morality based on [universal] human and extra-[national] concepts. We say that this is deception, dupery, stultification of [nations] in the interests of [world oligarchy]…. Our morality stems from the interests of the [national] struggle of the [ethnic Russians].” In such a way Russian neo-fascists attempt to recast fascism in terms of national liberation, which, in its turn, would supposedly nullify the grotesque effect of calling themselves anti-fascists.

Although conceived as originally equal, competing systems of national values, as Russian neo-fascists argue, are subordinated to a privileged Master, whose role ethnic Russians supposedly have a right to claim. Ethnic Russians are depicted as more civilized, rational, and politically sophisticated when compared to the purportedly aggressive, tribal social organization central to the Eastern national others. The Russian national vision is also assumed to be ideologically inspired in contrast to the arguably cynical and thus politically listless idea of Western democracy. Having placed the Russian national subject in a position alternative to both

---

301 The original quote of Lenin at the Congress is as follows: “We reject any morality based on extra-human and extra-class concepts. We say that this is deception, dupery, stultification of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landowners and capitalists….Our morality stems from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat.” Lenin n.pag.
the barren West which is not a true Master and the Eastern Slave, Russian neo-fascists strive to declare the utmost mastery, the bio-spiritual superiority of the Russian nation.

Yielding to the “multitude and economic strength of [Russia’s] adversaries,” or the physical and financial might of the East and the West respectively, ethnic Russians are arguably nevertheless worthy to carry out “God’s special mandates, which separate [the Russian people] from other [nations].” The whole “Russian ethnonational history” - the Russian “drama” of suffering, courage and survival against all odds, the story of the nation that has become “hardened as a nation by several world wars and revolutions” – purportedly allows ethnic Russians to prove authority over national others.

By inviting ethnic Russians to “remember [their] superiority for the sake of [their] ancestors, buried from Crimea to Ussuri Taiga, where they fell in the battle with the tyranny of [national others],” Russian neo-fascists also profess the supposedly grand role of war, including the Great Patriotic War, in fostering a sense of national solidarity and encouraging active civic engagement. Having disposed of the clear distinction between the words “fascism” and “anti-fascism,” Russian neo-fascists also manage to dilute the meaning of “democracy.” Thus in the Russian neo-fascists’ national fantasy, any political action, whether it is commonly characterized as fascist or anti-fascist, strives toward the ideal of “democracy” as longs as Russian national interests are regarded as of paramount importance.

302 Savelyev, “Russian Truth” n. pag.; Leontyev n.pag.
303 Remizov n.pag.
304 “Europe That We Will Build” n.pag. Also see “Condemnation” n.pag.
5 THE MANY FACES OF TRUE AND PURPORTED ANTI-FASCISM IN MODERN RUSSIA

As the previous chapter showed, the problem of neo-fascism in modern Russia is not to be taken lightly. Russian neo-fascists promote an image of a suffering nation, destined to fulfill its heroic prophecy via the tragic sacrifice of its ethnic and racial enemies in a war. However, one may think that in a country harboring painful memories of German fascism the neo-fascist narrative of the nation is bound to meet resistance. The state-sponsored “democratic anti-fascist” group Nashi (“Ours”) and the independent anti-fascist movement Antifa both claim to be the forces of such resistance. Having declared their uncompromising anti-fascist and pseudo “anti-fascist” positions, Antifa and Nashi respectively, as this chapter establishes, fight decidedly different fights. While Antifa recognizes the immense danger of Russian neo-fascism, Nashi sees the peril of fascism elsewhere. “The state youth,” as Nashi calls itself, battles primarily with the “state fascism” of the U.S., Estonia, Latvia, Georgia, and other countries, including Western European states and the U.S., and individuals whose actions anger the Kremlin.¹

While in the previous chapter I discussed what fascism is, how it is to be approached from an ethical perspective, as well as analyzed the psycho-rhetorical narrative of the properly fascist Russian national subject, in this chapter I focus on the negotiation of the idea of Russianness by the aforementioned anti-fascist and purportedly anti-fascists national actors: the “democratic and anti-fascist” youth group Nashi, Putin as its sponsor, and the independent anti-fascist movement, also known as Antifa.

¹ “Estonia’s State Fascism” n.pag.
5.1 *Nashi* as an Ideological Mouthpiece of the Kremlin

*Nashi* is not the only pro-Kremlin youth organization. Other major pro-Putin organizations include, for instance, *Mestnye* (“Locals”), a regional, anti-immigrant organization; *Rossiya Molodaya* (“Young Russia”), a nationalist movement actively engaged in provocateur tactics at oppositional rallies; *Molodaya Gvardiya* (“Young Guard”), the youth wing of Putin’s United Russia party; *Novye Ludi* (“New People”), a trans-regional organization tasked with the preparation of the “new” Russian youth, future government officials; and *Georgievtsy* (“St. Georges”), a Russian Orthodox movement. Yet, among all other state-sponsored organizations, *Nashi* stands out as “a notorious symbol of modern Russia.”

Established in 2005, *Nashi*, also referred to as *Putinjugend* in the liberal Russian press and blogosphere, quickly became a fairly pronounced force, mainly due to its scandalous protests against Russia’s external and internal “enemies.” The group was conceived specifically with the purpose to unveil “the truth about the ‘orange’ technologies, created and successfully implemented by the U.S., and ‘color’ revolutions, carried out in a number of the CIS countries.”

Before I explicate why *Nashi* sees their anti-fascist mission chiefly in terms of the fight with the West, which arguably contributed to so called “color revolutions” - a wave of pro-democratic

---


3 Bernas n.pag.

4 Melnikov n.pag. While the *Nashi* movement has drawn much attention from the Russian and foreign mass media, the organization has not yet become an object of persistent academic research. For studies that have touched upon the politics and actions of *Nashi*, see Ambrosio, *Authoritarian Backlash*; Ambrosio, “Russia”; Atwal, “Evaluating”; Atwal, “Vpered!”; Belov; Buchacek; Freedman; Hamilton and Mangott; Horvath; Lassila; Loskutova (especially 259-281); Mijnssen; Mitrokhin; Stent.

5 “Vladimir: Truth” n.pag. In addition to the Orange Revolution - a series of protests against the falsification of the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine - some other recent color revolutions are the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, and the Jeans/Denim Revolution in Belarus in 2006. For more, see Andrusenko; Bash, King, and Dougherty; Beachain and Polese; Nepstad; Herd; Makarychev; and Schipani-Aduriz; Wilson; Aslund.
nonviolent resistance with regard to key political issues, including election fraud - in post-Soviet republics and the countries in the Middle East, North Africa and the rest of the world, I must discuss the role of the Nashi project in Russian politics, as well as introduce the events that generated most of Nashi’s “anti-fascist” narrative analyzed in this Chapter.

One of the biggest international scandals involving Nashi was an argument between Russia and Estonia over the removal of the Soviet monument in Tallinn. The controversy was caused by Nashi’s crusade against Estonia’s “state fascism” in connection with the relocation of a Soviet World War II memorial, commonly known as the Bronze Soldier. Since the 1990s the Bronze Soldier monument, which was erected in 1947 and officially known as the monument to the Soldier-Liberator, or the monument to the Fallen in World War II, has been an object of heated discussions: it has been considered by Estonian nationalists to be a symbol of the Soviet occupation. In February 2007 the parliament of Estonia ratified an amendment to the bill on demolition of banned constructions. According to the bill, banned constructions are constructions that “celebrate occupation of the former republic of Estonia, mass repressions in Estonia, which could endanger the life, health and property of the people, incite hatred or could trigger public peace disturbance.” Following the newly amended law, the government of Estonia planned to relocate the Bronze Soldier monument and the bed of honor (the graves of Soviet soldiers who died on the territory of Estonia during World War II) from the center of Tallinn.

After the discussions of the bill began in the Estonian parliament, a group of Estonian nationalists attempted to lay a barbed-wire wreath at the monument, which provoked a fight between Estonian nationalists and monument defenders (most of the latter were members of the

---

6 “Estonia’s State Fascism” n.pag.
7 “Estonian Parliament” n.pag.
Nochnoi Dozod, or Night Watch, civic movement). On April 26, 2007, the situation culminated in a violent mass riot at the Bronze Soldier monument, known as the Bronze Night. Several thousand ethnic Russians (citizens of Estonia and citizens of Russia) gathered at Tõnismägi square, at the Bronze Soldier monument, to protest the decision of the parliament. As the result of the clashes with the police, more than 800 people were arrested, 153 people were injured and one man (a citizen of Russia) was killed. On the same night the monument was dismantled and relocated to the military cemetery in Tallinn, approximately two kilometers from the original location of the monument.

While the Prime Minister of Estonia Andrus Ansip ensured that reburial of the soldiers’ graves would be performed “with dignity and in accordance with all internationally recognized rules,” Russia regarded the reburial and relocation of the monument as “revision of the anti-Hitler coalition states’ role in the struggle against fascism during the Second World War, which goes against not only international law but also the very principles of morality and humanity.”

A string of events followed the Bronze Night in Tallinn. Inspired by First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov’s call to boycott Estonian food exported to Russia, several Russian supermarket chains refused to sell Estonian products and the National Meat Association of Russia called for suspension of business relations with Estonian companies. In addition, the Russian Rail Roads state company stopped processing shipments of oil products to Estonia (yet, the company denied it had any political reasons).

---

8 The Night Watch (õine Vahtkond in Estonian) is a non-governmental organization in Estonia aiming to protect the rights of ethnic Russians in Estonia. See the Night Watch website at <http://www.dozor.ee> and at <http://nightwatch.my1.ru>.

9 Nashi denies that any of the group activists participated in the Bronze Night. See “Court Acquitted”; “Concerned with Estonia’s Actions.”

10 Shegedin and Sysoyev n.pag.; “Note of Protest” n.pag.

11 As Ivanov clarified, he was not talking about official economic sanctions against Estonia, but called ordinary Russians to take an unprompromising “civic position”: “if Russian citizens do not like the politics of Estonia, then they should not buy its food products.” “First Deputy Prime Minister of the RF Called for a Boycott” n.pag.
Nashi, as well as other Kremlin sponsored youth organizations, such as the Eurasian Youth Union (ESM), Mestnye, Molodaya Gvardiya and Rossiya Molodaya, picketed the Estonian diplomatic mission in Moscow for several days with slogans such as “Lackeys of NATO - hands off the Russian Soldier,” “Hitler is an Estonian hero,” “The Second World War continues,” and “Fascism will not pass.” The picketing youth closed off all entrances into the Estonian Embassy, precluding then Estonian Ambassador Marina Kaljurand from leaving the Embassy on April 27, although on May 2 she was able to go to a press conference, which Nashi, however, attempted to disrupt, and she departed for Estonia a day later.

In addition, quite a few threats were made: the leader of the ESM Pavel Zariffulin, for example, said that the union is “ready to send…activists to Estonia to conduct some sabotage of [their] own. [They] might set border marking poles on fire. It is high time to instill the Russian order there.” Nashi too promised to go to Estonia “to work there as ‘live monuments’.” The leader of the far-right Liberal Democratic Party Zhirinovsky, who joined the unsanctioned picket at the Embassy at one point, gave Estonia an ultimatum – to apologize to Russia and relocate the monument back to its place or the “[Russian] airborne division may start military maneuvers along the border with Estonia and get lost there. They will guarantee a night of horror there.”

Some of pro-Kremlin youth organizations, including Nashi, eventually moved beyond their words. The youth wing of A Just Russia party, for instance, blocked the Russian-Estonian border for half an hour, while Nashi activists traveled to Estonia on tourist visas to participate in

---

12 See “Concerned with Estonia’s Actions.”
13 Nashi explained Kaljurand’s departure as “a cowardly escape,” which signaled arguably nothing but Nashi’s victory. However, according to the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kaljurand simply left Moscow due to an earlier planned vacation. “Russia Was Not Ready to Defend the Bronze Soldier” n.pag. See also “Nashi’s Pogrom at AiF.”
14 “Concerned with Estonia’s Actions” n.pag. “Russian” in “the Russian order” here is Russkiy, or ethnic Russian.
15 “Concerned with Estonia’s Actions” n.pag.
16 “Concerned with Estonia’s Actions” n.pag.
the Vigil of Memory. Over the period of approximately one month, Nashi activists, donned in military capes of the Second World War period, attempted to pose as live monuments at the very place where the Bronze Soldier monument was originally located. Each of them was detained and, as a result, expelled from Estonia for the violation of the conditions of their tourist visas. To top it off, in order “to teach the Estonian authorities a lesson,” Nashi hackers attacked the websites of the Estonian government, political parties, and media, some of which were hit by denial-of-service (DoS), and some were defaced or reposted (e.g., on the website of Estonia’s ruling Reform Party hackers posted an apology note on behalf of Prime Minister Ansip). Besides, Nashi insisted that there was nothing illegal in the denial-of-service attack: “It was not a cyber attack, but an act of civil disobedience, organized in the virtual space.”

In their turn, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia began to protest against the “psychoterror” of Nashi: Estonia accused Russia of breaking the Vienna Convention, which guarantees diplomatic inviolability, and turned to the European Union with a proposition to introduce sanctions against Russia. The citizens of Russia participating in the Bronze Night riots, along with Nashi activists who participated in the Vigil of Memory in Estonia, as well as anti-Estonian events in Russia, were black-listed by the Estonian Embassy in Moscow and banned from entering Estonia and other Schengen countries.

After the relocation, the Bronze Soldier monument was defaced several times, and, as the Night Watch claims, the administration of the military cemetery in Tallinn did not take any steps

---

17 See “Nashi Activist Was Released from Custody in Tallinn.”
19 “The Act of Hacking Disobedience” n.pag. A denial-of-service (DoS) attack is an attempt to make a network resource, such as a website, unavalable to its intended users by overloading it with fraudulent requests. As Nashi took responsibility for the cyber attack (the group did it only with regard to DoS and only a couple of years later), they explained that Nashi activists simply visited the target websites at the same time, causing them to go down. Cyber security experts, however, believe that such an attack could have been carried out only with the help of a virulent software that causes several dozen thousands of computers send simultaneous service requests.
20 See “Estonia Protests”; “Estonia Removed”; “Head of the Ministry”; Kapov; Polunin.
regarding the matter.\textsuperscript{21} Estonia’s decision to relocate the monument was supported by the U.S. and some European countries. According to U.S. Ambassador to Estonia Stanley Davis Phillips, “the Bronze night and cyber attacks put Estonia on the world map.”\textsuperscript{22} The war on Soviet symbols spread to other countries: Poland, for instance, developed two laws allowing local authorities to remove and relocate Soviet monuments. “Symbols of the Communist dictatorship must disappear from Polish streets,” Minister of Culture and National Heritage Kazimierz Ujazdowski said in the midst of the Bronze Soldier scandal.\textsuperscript{23}

The events surrounding the relocation of the Bronze Soldier monument in Tallinn heralded a new stage in the relations between Estonia and Russia. The Bronze Night forced the former Soviet republics to voice their discontent with, and distrust of, each other louder than ever. Unable to leave aside the historical baggage of World War II and Soviet times, the reactions of both countries to the relocation of the Bronze Soldier monument intensified the long held animosities. Just a cursory glance at media coverage of the relations between Estonia and Russia indicates considerable tension. For instance, in August 2010 the Ministry of Defense of Estonia organized a military-patriotic exercise and competition (i.e., “The Erna Raid”) to commemorate the activity of the Erna long-range reconnaissance group which consisted of Estonian SS volunteers.\textsuperscript{24} Further, in October 2010 Estonian teenagers created and uploaded a video in which they were “jokingly” killing a Russian teenager.\textsuperscript{25} The video was accompanied by explanations stating that the video illustrated the proper way to kill ethnic Russians. Reportedly due to their young age, the creators of the video were not prosecuted. These events once again

\textsuperscript{21} See “Monument to the Soldier-Liberator.”
\textsuperscript{22} See Rank.
\textsuperscript{23} “New Scandal” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{24} See Aleksandrovskii.
\textsuperscript{25} See Kretsul.
alarmed Russian society and Russian officials, who promptly accused Estonia of glorifying fascism.

The aforementioned diplomatic incident was not the only scandal that involved Nashi. A year earlier Nashi had already had an altercation with a foreign diplomat: the group picketed the British Embassy in Moscow, protesting against the participation of British Ambassador to Russia Anthony Brenton in The Other Russia forum, a meeting of oppositional - communist, nationalist and liberal - politicians and human right activists. Following former Russian President Putin, who characterized Brenton’s participation in the forum as an attempt “to influence the internal balance of power in Russia,” Nashi picketed the British Embassy, demanding that Brenton apologize for “appearing before fascists” and providing moral and financial support to the forum. Other major campaigns of Nashi were directed at foreign “politicians-falsifiers” and “fascists” - primarily pro-American leaders of former Soviet republics, such as Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, as well as Russia’s archenemy, the U.S., in the person of former U.S. President George W. Bush (“the epitome of political tyranny and absolutely barbarous lust for power”) and U.S. President Barack Obama (“a demagogue and a war-monger”). Last but not least on Nashi’s enemy list are Russian opposition groups, “lingerie-clad prostitutes who sell out Russia for the U.S. dollar.”

In addition to attacking “the essential electronic infrastructure” of Estonia, including the country’s major media outlets, banks and governmental websites, in 2007, a year later Nashi engaged in a similar DoS attack on the Russian independent newspaper Kommersant’s website. After the Kommersant had named Nashi likuyuschaya gopota, or “jubilant rabble,” and pointed

---

27 “Yushchenko” n.pag.; “Wait” n.pag.; “Nashi Demands the U.S.” n.pag.; “Number of Troops” n.pag.
28 Halpin n.pag.
29 Joshua Davis n.pag. See also Clover; Cullison,”Hacking”; Shachtman.
out the uselessness of the movement to the Kremlin, Nashi promised to “create unbearable conditions for Kommersant,” “to psychologically and physically finish” the newspaper.30

One may also recall Nashi’s reaction to former anti-Communist dissident and Russian journalist Aleksandr Podrabinek’s article, in which he harshly criticized Soviet war veterans for clinging to the “bloody, false and shameful” Soviet past.31 Following the Moscow’s Veteran Council demands to remove the “Anti-Soviet [Cafe]” sign at an eatery in Moscow, Podrabinek wrote:

But the Soviet Union is not the same country, which you depicted in school textbooks and your lying press. The Soviet Union is not just political instructors, Stakhanovites, shock workers of Communist labor and cosmonauts. The Soviet Union is also peasant rebellions, the sacrifices of collectivization and the Holodomor [the widespread famine in Soviet Ukraine the 1930s], hundreds of innocent people shot in KGB basements, and millions of people tormented in the GULAG to the strains of Mikhalkov’s rotten anthem. The Soviet Union is dissidents who spent their lives confined in nuthouses, it is underhanded murders, and nameless graves on countless camp cemeteries, graves for my dissident friends, who did not live to see our freedom.32

In response, Nashi attempted to sue the journalist for defamation, who, in Nashi’s view, insulted WWII veterans. They threatened him and picketed his house. As a result of the “unthinkable hounding,” the journalist and his family went into hiding.33

30 "Jubilant Rabble" n.pag.
31 Podrabinek n.pag.
32 Podrabinek n.pag.
Besides the incident with Podrabinke in September 2009, Nashi was also involved in a few assaults on opposition leader and Putin’s critic Boris Nemtsov. At least three times, in November 2007, November 2010 and January 2011, Nashi activists tried to put a butterfly net with a sign saying “political insect” on Nemtsov. In November 2007 they also poured liquid chocolate on the politician, as well as squirted ammonia in his face in March 2009. Similarly, Nashi harassed another liberal politician - Garry Kasparov: the youth, for example, disrupted his press conferences, and one Nashi activist chained himself to Kasparov’s car a few times.  

For its devoted allegiance to the country’s leaders, Nashi is often rightly compared to the youth wing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union - the Komsomol. Nashi’s website domain name is (dot)SU - an extension assigned to the Soviet Union. Moreover, Nashi calls itself the “state youth” (gosmolodezh). Another stark reminder of the Soviet times is the slogan of the Mishki (“Teddy Bears”), a Nashi children’s auxiliary group. Just as in Soviet times, the organization devotedly praises the country’s leaders: the Mishki’s catchphrase “Thank you, Putin, for our stable future” is a close copy of the old Soviet slogan “Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood.” Besides the Komsomol’s avant-gardism and the old Soviet rhetorical style, Nashi’s rebellious zeal is also somewhat reminiscent of Mao’s Red Guard; the organization’s emphasis on the values of discipline and physical self-control fairly approximates the pedagogical practices of the Hitler Youth. It is hardly surprising that critics of Nashi have

34 See Kara-Murza; “Kremlin Critic in Ammonia Attack”; “Pro-Kremlin Youth Movement Accuses USA of Inciting Coup in Russia”; “Russian Opposition Leader Nemtsov Attacked with Butterfly Net.”
35 See Ambrosio, Authoritarian Backlash 64; Freedman 3.
36 In early 2012 Nashi’s website (www.nashi.su) started to deny access to anyone outside the Russian Federation. The reasons behind such a measure are unknown. In order to access the website, anyone who lives outside Russia must use a Russian-based proxy.
37 See Arnold; “Trans-regional”; “Little Mishki”; “New Movement.”
dubbed the organization “Putin Youth” - “the Kremlin’s shock troops in a disturbing turn
towards [ethnic] nationalism.”  

Inspired by its own work and endorsed by the Kremlin, the Nashi group even discussed the possibility of transforming into a political party. While that did not happen, Nashi has nonetheless served as a political incubator for young politicians. Thus, for instance, Nashi’s founder Vasily Yakemenko became the leader of the State Committee on Youth Affairs, later known as the Federal Youth Agency; and the Nashi leader Nikita Borovikov founded the Smart Russia party, aiming to “change the way of thinking of those who rule the country.”

In February 2012, the Russian branch of the “hacktivist” group Anonymous leaked Nashi’s emails, documenting its dirty tactics, including bugging telephones of oppositional leaders, paying numerous bloggers to promote Putin and Medvedev’s “tandemocracy” and conduct smear campaigns against the opposition. February’s so-called Nashismgate depicted the already compromised youth movement as an expensive and ruthless Kremlin tool to deal with anybody who goes against the regime. The leaked emails finally brought to light the financial support needed for Nashi’s frantic activities (an average campaign conducted by Nashi cost around eight hundred thousand dollars).

Shortly after the Nashismgate, the activity of the organization slowed down significantly, which led to speculations that Nashi was to stop functioning. Some insisted that Nashi, being further compromised by the leaked emails, became an embarrassment; others argued that the

---

38 Halpin n.pag. Freedman sees Nashi as “a combination of the Komsomol...and the Hitler Jugend,” while Federation Council chairman Sergei Mironov has likened Nashi’s activists to Mao’s Red Guards, warning the Kremlin that Nashi can eventually turn against its patrons. Glikin n.pag. See also Fitzpatrick; Meisner; Rempel.

39 Putin and Medvedev visited Nashi’s ideological summer camp at Lake Seliger more than once, lending “the driving force of the country’s development” their absolute support. “Dmitriy Medvedev” n.pag. Also see “Must the Nashi Movement.”

40 Krivobok n.pag. See “Yakemenko.”

41 See Bernas; Elder, “Hacked Emails”; “Jubilant Rabble”; “Nashismgate.”

42 See Elder, “Nervous Kremlin”; “Let”; “Nashismgate”; Soldatov and Borogan

43 See Kuzmenkova and Vinokurova; Walker.
youth group’s projects and propaganda were too primitive and irrelevant in the circumstances when pressing economic, social and political problems in Russia could not be easily blamed on foreign “enemies.” It was also suggested that Nashi’s leader Vasiliy Yakemenko and Nashi’s founder Vladimir Surkov simply were no longer favored in the Kremlin. Amid widespread speculations about the end of the movement, and despite Nashi’s questionable image, the “democratic anti-fascist” youth movement reportedly “continues to more than merely exist; it gives birth to new projects, which simply are too congested within the present organization.”

As Kristina Potupchik, a former Nashi’s spokesperson, adds, “we do not close, it is your white-ribbon-fountain [or oppositional] ‘revolution’ that comes to an end.” According to the latest reports, “the history of the [group] in its present form is over”: Nashi has reformed itself into a network of loosely connected projects, as, for instance, a “patriotic” youth movement Stal’ (“Steel”), an “archive of video-memories” Tvoi Film o Voyne (“Your Film about the War”), a consumer-rights project Kontrolnaya Zakupka (“Sample Purchase”), an environmental project Ekologiya (“Ecology”), and a health project Begi za Mnoy (“Run after Me”), some of which, as for instance the latter, became a part of Rosmolodezh, or the Federal Youth Agency, sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.

---

44 Judging by the increasingly hostile and conspiratorial rhetoric of the Kremlin during Putin’s third and fourth terms as President, when Russia’s problems have been more often attitubed to the supposedly malicious agenda of the West with regard to Russia, Nashi’s crass propaganda is not likely to be a reason why the group stopped operating. In fact, as I argued in Chapter Two, the rhetorical operation of scapegoating does not involve any comic self-reflection and as such is the most “natural,” that is, the least ethically consuming, way to construct an enjoyable national fantasy.

45 See Rakhimdzhanova.

46 Potupchik, “Nashi” n.pag.

47 Potupchik, “Nashi” n.pag. “White-ribbon-fountain ‘revolution’” refers to the actions of the oppositional movement. A white ribbon is its symbol, and a fountain on Pushkin Square in Moscow is where oppositional leaders climbed at one of their rallies. See Shuster, “When a Protest”; Vassilieva.

While *Nashi* was never a widely popular organization and is often ridiculed in the liberal Russian blogosphere and press, it nevertheless was a significant element of Kremlin politics. The pro-Kremlin youth organization, though under a different name (*Idushchie Vmeste*, “Marching Together”), existed since Putin’s first term in office, and at its very inception the organization declared the regime’s uncompromising suspicion of liberal democratic tendencies and influences from the West.49 What emerged as *Nashi* became an ideological mouthpiece of the Kremlin. While Putin, as I will show later, has virtually never spoken in an explicitly tragic manner in order to sustain an appearance of Russia’s supposedly democratic regime and an image of Russian society that is purportedly accepting of various views, *Nashi*’s rhetoric has been much more openly tragic.50 In *Nashi*’s national fantasy all countries that support the Western model of liberal democracy, as well as Russian liberal politicians, are unequivocally qualified as enemies of Russia and Putin’s regime (and the latter is assumed to be a guarantor of Russia’s sovereignty). In a way, by means of its brazen actions and tragic rhetoric, *Nashi* had been testing the receptivity of Russian society to aggressive foreign politics and repressive domestic measures, which Putin’s third and fourth terms as President of Russia spiraled into. As the upcoming close textual analysis of *Nashi*’s psycho-rhetorical narrative elucidates, in attempts to justify *Nashi*’s fight with anyone who purportedly wants to harm Russia, the group employs the tragic fantasy-frame and the tragically marked epic, elegy, burlesque, and the grotesque. These fantasy-frames, coupled with the almost total absence of the Lacanian-Burkean tragicomic attitude, describe *Nashi*’s psycho-rhetorical narrative as politically dangerous and ethically problematic.

---
49 See Corwin.
50 Although Putin claims to “speak openly,” even in his most belligerent speeches the U.S. and other Western countries are referred to, for example, as none other than “partners.” “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” 2014, n.pag. See also “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” 2016.
5.1.1 Nashi’s Tragic “Anti-Fascism”

As Nashi characterizes itself, it is a “democratic anti-fascist movement,” fighting “misanthropic ideology,” “anti-democratic and inhumane rhetoric” and all those who “deny people with different skin color, different ideals the right to exist.”\(^{51}\) Group activists emphasize that xenophobia and fascism as “an anti-ethnic-Russian ideology” has always been alien to ethnic Russians, while respect for other nations and ethnic minorities is what has supposedly kept multinational Russia whole.\(^{52}\) Besides, since “fascism is an ideology of the oppressed and discontented nations,” it has arguably no chance to do well in Russia.\(^{53}\) As Nashi adds, “there is no place for discontent in Russia, as the [Russian] people choose their own authorities.”\(^{54}\) In other words, Nashi believes in an inherently comic nature of ethnic Russians, or their historically ingrained aversion to such a tragic ideology as fascism.\(^{55}\)

This, however, does not prevent the group from acknowledging the expansion of skinhead and other neo-fascist activities across Russia and expressing regrets that most Russian citizens fail to discern the problem. Yet, as Nashi clarifies, “there are no real fascists in Russia, while there are many political groups that can be regarded as followers of fascism. Many groups

\(^{51}\) “Manifesto” n.pag.
\(^{52}\) “A. Solzhenitsyn” n.pag. See also “Kostroma: Russia.”
\(^{53}\) “Ivanovo” n.pag.
\(^{54}\) “Ivanovo” n.pag.
\(^{55}\) It is worth pointing out that, just like the narrative of Russian neo-fascists (which, however, unlike Nashi, is represented by a number of distinct groups), the national fantasy of the Kremlin-backed group is built around some contradictory statements. Thus, for instance, on a different occasion Nashi admits that “[t]he threat of fascism exists as long as society experiences significant social tension. This applies to any country, including Russia. Owing to Russia’s tough anti-fascist ideology, fascism in our country is less developed than in other countries with the same pressing social problems. But, nevertheless, both the danger of the growth of fascism exists and dozens of small fascist organizations already function even in our country, which suffered from fascism the most.” “Manifesto” n. pag.
preach an ideology of radical nationalism and national insensitivity, which brings them closer to fascists.”

In contrast to “real” fascism that Nashi describes as a reaction of socially disadvantaged groups of people to unfavorable economic conditions, the most recent fascist tendencies in Russia are purportedly of a different origin: it is “occult-nostalgic and glamorous fascism.”

As Nashi further laments, for most ethnic Russian “pseudo-patriots,” contemporary Russian fascism is nothing but a fad, perpetuated by “glossy magazines and literary critics [that] sing praises to modern fascism.” In the eyes of the youth group, such “fashion-forward” radicals are no more than “clueless patriots” with “teenage needs,” “ punks,” “behaving like idiots,” or “fascist misfits,” whose attempts at…posing as ‘real ethnic Russians,’ seemed funny and absurd.”

Having failed to acknowledge that for centuries the dominant Russian idea has been molded largely by tragic political, social and cultural beliefs and practices, such as xenophobia, military chauvinism, racism, anti-Semitism, Russian Orthodoxy and a penchant for a strong government, Nashi stresses that Russian neo-fascism

does not have any cultural foundation, cemented in history. [It] is entirely borrowed from American movies and pop culture…The clothes are those of British football hooligans, American movie heroes look back from their profile pictures, American heroism and hypocrisy is an example they follow – this is a portrait of the modern ethnic Russian nationalist.

Apparently, such wacky, or burlesque, characters are seen as “a threat for democracy [in Russia]” only because they and their “banal fascism” are necessarily connected with attempts at

---

56 “Manifesto” n. pag.
57 “ConSSonance March” n.pag.
58 “Sochi” n.pag.; “Cheboksary” n. pag.
59 “The Revolution Is Off” n.pag.; “We Need an Answer” n.pag.
60 “The Revolution Is Off” n.pag.
“[legalizing] fascism on a political level.” Nashi’s reference to the banal fascism of Russian neo-fascists, however, bears no comparison to Arendt’s idea of the banality of evil, since the former considers Russian neo-fascism described in Chapter Four as simply marginal, superficial and thus nonthreatening on its own.

Staking out a claim for its leadership in an anti-fascist fight, Nashi thus mentions what can be truly considered (and is described in Chapter Four) as neo-fascism in Russia only in passing, and most often it is purportedly a serious issue only when linked to the “fascism” of the Kremlin’s opposition, both at home and abroad: “To get rid of fascism, as our movement thinks, it is necessary to take a few simple steps: [Russian liberal politician] Khakamada and other pseudo-liberal politicians must stop flirting with fascists from the banned National Bolshevik Party (Natsbol); Moscow’s authorities must stop giving permission to hold Russian Marches in Moscow; Russia’s State Duma must define ‘fascism’ clearly and adopt laws that guarantee effective and timely suppression of any signs of fascism; and the state and law-enforcement authorities must respond harshly to any hate crimes.”

“To name fascism for what it is,” Nashi asserts in its educational brochure “Unusual Fascism,” “is to help people find out the truth.” And that is what Nashi members are purportedly occupied with.

To stress the difference between domestic neo-fascists and those whom Nashi regards as much more sinister opponents, the group argues that the former are

[u]nable to understand that the might of Russia is in the unity of our nation, [and thus] they consciously incite hatred, consciously provoke conflicts without thinking how it may end. Yet their leaders are usual swindlers who successfully combine their [political] activity with business and care primarily for money.

---

61 "Ivanovo” n.pag.; “Nashi Delivers an Attack on Fascism” n.pag.
62 “How to Defeat” n.pag.
63 “Nashi Published” n.pag.
Their real masters sit in comfortable chairs overseas, skillfully pulling strings and generously giving money to the [Russian] fringe groups.\textsuperscript{64}

In other words, while ordinary Russian neo-fascists, whom \textit{Nashi} sees as stern and sincere proponents of “aggressive, radical nationalism” and members of “profascist cliques” at the very most, are depicted as totally oblivious to the consequences of their actions, their domestic leaders and foreign sponsors supposedly act as cynical crooks that strive to benefit from a possible escalation of ethnic tensions, leading to a civil war and even the break-up of Russia.\textsuperscript{65} By placing the cynical, supposedly deideologized, rather than the ideologically motivated actor into the position of the ultimate national enemy, \textit{Nashi} activists, who nevertheless call themselves “sincere patriots,” attempt, first, to absolve Russian neo-fascists of responsibility for their criminal hatred, that is, their tragic ideology, and, second, to devalue an ideologically sincere belief that does not complement the Kremlin’s agenda, portraying it as ineptitude or, at best, naïveté.

In addition to the disparity between the ways in which \textit{Nashi} gauges the threats coming from Russian neo-fascists and their supposed masters, the group also treats Russian neo-fascists and all other real or purported fascists that are critical of the Kremlin asymmetrically. The forces that supposedly strive “to revive fascist and ethnic nationalist ideas” in order to destroy Russia include some local authorities, pro-Western liberal politicians, neo-fascists and governments of certain former Soviet republics, as well as the European Union and the U.S.\textsuperscript{66} It is against them that \textit{Nashi}’s most violent, tragic actions are directed. As mentioned above, the group’s activists got into the habit of harassing Russian opposition politicians and foreign diplomats of the

\textsuperscript{64} “National Unity Day: Fascists Failed” n.pag.; Speaking of the unity of nations, Nashi refer to the multiethnic and multicultural make-up of the Russian Federation.
\textsuperscript{65} “Manifesto” n.pag.; “The Revolution Is Off” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{66} See “We Need an Answer”; “A. Solzhenitsyn”; David White.
supposedly unfriendly states. In addition to physically aggressive methods, Nashi indulges in symbolic violence too. During its annual ideological summer camp on Lake Seliger, the youth group, for example, introduced an installation that featured the impaled mannequin heads portraying Russia’s supposed enemies – domestic and foreign politicians, public figures and human rights activists which are critical of the Kremlin. In another purportedly artful attempt to expose the “fascist” nature of the country’s foes, more precisely, Estonia, in relation to the country’s decision to relocate the Bronze Soldier, Nashi organized a mass action: group activists offered passersby an opportunity to “shoot down” an image of a “fascist” with paintballs.

Unlike the symbolic mortification of Russia’s “fascist” enemies, the treatment of Russian neo-fascists is much more delicate. Proposing to combat fascism in Russia as “a successor state of the multinational and harmonious USSR,” Nashi insists that “one must conduct thorough work, and not take single actions, which are more self-promotion than anything else.”

Ironically, the group’s “anti-fascism” does not amount to anything more than a number of unsystematic and unproductive activities, needed to maintain an appearance of serious anti-fascist work. Thus, for example, to resist extreme expressions of ethnic hatred, Nashi members paint graffiti of “pink hearts or funny smilies” over “shameful [fascist] slogans and images”; repaint building walls into the colors of the national flag while listening to patriotic music; get passersby to photograph in national costumes of various ethnic minorities of the Russian Federations; set up make-shift hair salons to offer young people “antifa hairdos,” or a “creative, brave,” and “flamboyant image” with an ethnic twist as a sign of a person’s “vocal protest against racial intolerance,” as well as gather on Hitler’s birthday at dormitories to protect foreign students from neo-fascist assaults only to end up playing “interesting collective games [with

---

67 See “‘Seliger’ Is Sick in the Head.”
68 See “Voronezh.”
69 “1000 of Nashi Activists” n.pag.
them and]…little boys from the neighborhood. Like this *Nashi*’s initiative turned into an outdoor ‘lesson of friendship’.”^70

As such *Nashi*’s work illustrates the group’s perfunctory engagement with what it describes as anti-fascist resistance. Taking in consideration that xenophobic and racist sentiments appeal to a large portion of Russians, mainly due to the Kremlin’s increasingly aggressive nationalist propaganda, anything more than a superficial and unreflective demonstration of “tolerance” and “the friendship of nations” would be unpopular among Russians and, more importantly, would challenge the very purpose of the youth group – to fight the “orange” threat, that is, “to prevent a geopolitical *coup d'etat* in Russia and counter the introduction of the external control [over the country] under the disguise of a ‘color revolution’.”^71 By perpetuating the far-reaching Soviet myth of “the friendship of nations,” which I discussed in Chapter Three, *Nashi* embraces ethnic differences only as far as they are seen as a matter of appearances, rather than a politically meaningful issue. Just as in Soviet times non-Russian nationalist movements that opposed Soviet power were denounced as anti-Communist, so today any politically pronounced nationalist sentiments in former Soviet republics, which often fuel “color revolutions”, or non-violent protests against Kremlin-friendly corrupt and authoritarian governments that result in the shift of an ex-Soviet state’s allegiance toward the West and the hopeful pursuit of NATO membership, are color-coded: they are deemed “orange,” that is,

---

^70 “Vologda” n.pag.; “Tula: Creative Hair” n.pag.; “Tula: We Are Different” n.pag.; “Tver” n.pag. See also “Belgorod”; “Orel”; “Kostroma: Antifa Laboratory.”

^71 The slogan “Russia is for (ethnic) Russians” has been continuously supported by more than 50 percent of Russians polled by the Levada Center. See “Intolerance and Xenophobia.” Having realized the role of the Kremlin’s propaganda, which undoubtedly contributed to such situation and arguably destroyed the practice of responsible journalism, Alexey Kovalyov created and now edits the Noodleremover.news website that meticulously researches and skillfully debunks false or misleading stories in Kremlin-controlled mass media. The name of the website, published in Russian, is a word play on the Russian phrase “hang noodles on your ears,” meaning “pull the wool over your eyes,” or “deceive.” To read a short introduction of the project in English, see Rothrock. For more on modern Russian propaganda, see Christopher Walker; “The Propaganda of the Putin Era”; “Stifling the Public Sphere.”
Russophobe, undemocratic and fascist.\textsuperscript{72} What concerns the ethno-nationalist aspirations in the North Caucasus, they are distinctly characterized as terrorism.

There is no denying that nationalism often manifests itself in an illiberal, chauvinistic way. Owing to the underlying tension between the exclusive principles of descent, and cultural or religious specificity, that are foundational of ethnic nationalism, on the one hand, and open and all-embracing ideals of liberalism, on the other, national liberation aspirations of some non-Russian nations that were a part of the Soviet Union or reluctantly remain in the immediate sphere of modern Russia’s influence at times have been indeed marred by distinctly tragic tendencies. For instance, both official state and popular discourses in the Baltic states and Ukraine are yet to acknowledge the disturbing history of the collaboration of their nationalists with the Nazis.\textsuperscript{73} Moreover, in the process of building their national sovereignty after the dissolution of the USSR, some former Soviet republics adopted or were about to adopt discriminatory legislature against ethnic minorities. Thus, for instance, Latvia and Estonia did not automatically grant citizenship to all their residents after 1991, which left many ethnic Russians who moved there while those states were in the Soviet Union, as well as their descendants born in Estonia and Latvia prior to 1991, without citizenship.\textsuperscript{74} Another controversial issue concerned the decision of the Ukrainian Parliament to repeal the 2012 law on the status of the state language and languages of ethnic minorities, which guaranteed the right of many ethnic Russians living in Ukraine to use the Russian language in various spheres of their lives.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} Gitelman 466.
\textsuperscript{73} See Hiden and Housden; Stauber; Statiev.
\textsuperscript{74} See McGuinness.
\textsuperscript{75} See “The Council of Europe.”
Yet, the issue of ethnic peculiarity for non-Russian nations has been largely a question of their nation’s freedom from the totalitarian and authoritarian embrace of Soviet and modern Russia, and as such consonant with the fervor of the French Revolution, used to promote the ideas of personal and political liberties, democracy and popular self-determination.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, for instance, commenting on the annual marches of Ukrainian nationalists in Kiev and other Ukrainian cities to honor Stepan Bandera, a leader of Ukrainian independence and the anti-Soviet resistance movement who willingly, albeit briefly, cooperated with Nazi Germany, Umland argues that “[t]he iconic Stepan Bandera figure is supported less as a former ultra-nationalist and fascist, than as a resolute fighter against, and tragic victim of, Moscow’s imperialism.”\textsuperscript{77} While there are outright racists, anti-Semites and homophobes among Ukrainian nationalists, Umland insists that in general Ukrainian moderate nationalism is inclusive and civic, rather than illiberal and ethnic.

Just as the Ukrainian or Baltic nationalist movements cannot be wholly characterized as extreme right-wing or fascist, so neither can all Caucasian fighters for national independence, who threaten the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, be characterized as terrorists. While it is necessary to acknowledge the role of both domestic and foreign radical Islamists in the North Caucasus, who carried out, encouraged or condoned terrorist attacks in the Russian Federation, the Kremlin’s attempts to blame the instability in the region on religious fundamentalists disregard the existence of Chechen national liberation aspirations and other separatist and irredentist projects. As a reaction to the Russian Empire’s expansion into the Caucasus and the subsequent vicious politics of the Soviet and modern Russian state toward

\textsuperscript{76} On both the reciprocity and tension of (early and modern) nationalism and liberal principals, see Diamond and Plattner; Sa’adah; Snyder; Taras.
\textsuperscript{77} Umland, “A Comment on Yesterday’s Annual Bandera Marches” n.pag.; See also Umland, “Bad History Doesn’t Make Friends”; “Ukraine Nationalists March in Kiev to Honour Bandera.”
indigenous ethnic groups, separatist and inter-ethnic conflicts in the area have been brewing for centuries.\textsuperscript{78}

While downplaying the potential of Russian neo-fascism and magnifying the significance of pro-fascist tendencies in Ukraine and the Baltic states, as well as the infusion of international terrorism in the North Caucasus region, \textit{Nashi}, however, discerns the greatest threat in the intentions of the West, which purportedly fuels fascist sentiments in former Soviet republics and even condones and sponsors terrorist attacks in Russia and elsewhere. It is peculiar then how Western Europe and the U.S., which promote liberal values, rather than pro-fascist and properly fascist forces in Russia and former Soviet republics, have become \textit{Nashi}’s ultimate national enemy of the “democratic anti-fascist” youth group. While a cursory look at the group’s actions towards its opponents gives only a rough idea of \textit{Nashi}’s national vision, a symptomatic reading of \textit{Nashi}’s national fantasy allows us to understand what the group’s “anti-fascism” and “an eclectic ideological synthesis that defined [\textit{Nashi}’s] friends and foes” are.\textsuperscript{79}

As I mentioned above, for \textit{Nashi}, the most dangerous enemies of Russia are in the West. The U.S. stands out among them as the purportedly most vicious national other. In a way resembling NATO Supreme Commander Philip Breedlove’s sentiment that Russia presents an “existential threat” to the U.S., young “sincere patriots” declare that U.S. foreign policy, which manifests itself in “the predatory expansion of the U.S.,” aims to undermine Russia’s sovereignty, which stands for the idea of the complete national self: “America will not be Russia’s friend until the latter will be of strategic interest for the former. And there always be

\textsuperscript{78} The incorporation of the Caucasus into the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century ended with the mass extermination and forced resettlement of the Circassians to the Ottoman Empire. Other ethnic groups of the region – about half a million of the Chechens and the Ingushes, were also forcefully resettled at the end of the Second World War for purportedly collaborating with the Nazis. Having been later rehabilitated, many Chechens and Ingushes were able to return to the Caucasus only to find their land and homes occupied by other inhabitants - Ossetinians, Russians and others, which provoked inter-ethnic conflicts and violence.

\textsuperscript{79} Horvath 16.
such a relationship!“80 In a cartoon, made by Nashi in order to promote general conscription in Russia, the U.S. is depicted as an octopus-like monster that strives to devour the Russian Federation:

USA is a huge fatty, that…cannot stop consuming [various recourses such as oil, gas, metal, people]….But the most part of the American food is in Russia…. [Americans] have two options: either they eat less and less, stop growing and die, or they come and take our food. They cannot but come for it. And this is not because they dislike us or they are our enemies, not at all. This is because they want to eat and their state wants to eat. And an average American wants a powerful car, stylish clothes, a bigger house, and brighter light.81

Having unburdened its vision of international relations from any ideological considerations or traditional moral value, which is consonant with the most radical form of political realism - realpolitik, as well as making a subtle evaluative reference to what in Russia is traditionally considered as Western soulless materialism (yet without embracing the Left’s critique of consumerism), Nashi further explains that the U.S. is “scared” and “jealous” of “Vladimir Putin’s achievements,” “the increasingly effective state power,” and the overall “strengthening of [Russia]” and thus “[feels the urgency] to invade our country to take control over our resources.”82 For Nashi, the power and strength of the Kremlin and by extension Russia itself are the treasured objet a, which serves as a guarantor of the country’s sovereignty, both politically and ideationally, and as such is the target of Russia’s national others.

80 “NATO Commander” n.pag.; “Manifesto” n.pag.: 114; 25, 135. The emphasis is mine. For alternative opinions on how the West, more specifically NATO, should approach Russia, see Sakwa, “West Could Sleepwalk”; Shields.
81 “Russian Army & Nashi” n.pag.
82 “Nikolay” n.pag.; “Nashi Activists” n.pag.; 58; “American Vendetta” n.pag.; “Velikiy Novgorod” n.pag.
While insisting that “sheer cynicism” motivates the sinister agenda of the U.S., the Nashi group is nevertheless appalled by the supposedly devious plans and the politics of double standards favored by the U.S.: “by all means possible,” even using democracy as “[its] favorite pretext,” the U.S. attempts to “drive [Russia] out” from the global arena.83 The U.S. foreign policy in regard to, for example, Georgia, Libya, and Bolivia, where the U.S. “secretly plots to depose…President Evo Morales,” as well as the fact that the U.S. “misleads its NATO allies,” tries “by hook or by crook to keep Russia from entering the European energy market,” clearly illustrates, as Nashi emphasizes, that “globalist American acts belie Obama’s ‘multipolar’ words.”84 As a result, Nashi continues, “honest competition [with the U.S.] is simply out of the question.”85

Having expressed indignation with not so much cynicism, but with the national other’s attempts to veil it or present it from a morally advantageous position, Nashi repeats continuously that the real purpose of America’s “winged democracy” is to stall Russia’s development and, more specifically, “prevent Russia from passing a gas pipeline to Bosnia and Herzegovina. America is ready to do anything, even to methodically exterminate [thousands of] Serbs.”86 In addition, NATO, which is generally associated with the U.S., has purportedly turned into “an official protection racket for Afghan drug traffic,” thus causing problems both in Russia and other European countries.87 In other words, Russia has not been the only American foe: the U.S. “subjugated bled-white Europe,” “colonized” smaller countries, including some former Soviet republics, and “got into a fight with the whole world.”88 As Nashi stresses, “the aggressive

---

83 “Round” n.pag.; “Nashi Met” n.pag.; “Nashi Came” n.pag.
84 “Federal Security Service” n.pag.
85 “Manifesto” n.pag.
86 “Tula against” n.pag.; “Three” n.pag.
87 “Manifesto” n.pag.
88 “Kaliningrad” n.pag.; “Path” n.pag.; “Sheikh” n.pag. On the process of “new colonization,” see “Manifesto.”
foreign policy of the U.S. has already brought about a number of humanitarian catastrophes, wars and mass human rights violations” in different parts of the world. And those who are ready to sacrifice the well-being and lives of others “at the altar of [the supposedly non-existent] American democracy,” as the youth group emphasizes, are criminals or even worse - they are “devoid of everything human.”

*Nashi* concludes that “[t]he U.S. attempts to provoke the Third World War” by “bombing peaceful citizens” in Yugoslavia, Libya, Iraq and other countries, “supporting the territorial claims of Japan,” “meddling with the elections process and politics” in Russia, “financing organizations that undermine the political system of Russia, or supporting openly hostile [pro-Western] regimes in post-Soviet countries.” In *Nashi*’s view, “[i]t is easy to draw a historical parallel” between the role of the U.S. in World War II and its “subversive activities,” or “color revolutions,” in the post-Cold War period: “For the U.S. the Second World War was a way to overcome the Great Depression. And now, when the state and its currency have been weakened by the crisis, the U.S. again deliberately attempts to destabilize the situation in the world.”

Every action of the U.S., including even the release of a computer game, purportedly speaks volumes about the aggressive and malicious agenda of the state: “an American game, Modern Warfare 2 - the goal of which is to shoot Russian citizens on behalf of terrorists - was released on November 10. ‘To sell this game in Russia is a crime’.” *Nashi* activists are similarly outraged by U.S. Sen. Benjamin Cardin and Congressman Alcee Hastings’s “antidemocratic and inhumane rhetoric” regarding the 2010 Moscow Metro bombings. Making
a reference to the complicated history of Russia’s involvement in the North Caucasus, the American politicians described the bombings as “a cry for help to end the violence and poverty in Chechnya and neighboring regions which engender the desperation that makes these sorts of incidents more likely.” In short, Nashi’s national fantasy is a conspiracy-driven narrative in which the U.S. is portrayed as a devious criminal engaged in sneaky tactics, an aggressive provocateur, and, as I will explain in greater detail below, a “inhumane” fascist and terrorist sympathizer.

As Nashi argues, hostility and backstabbing on the part of the West have been characteristic of the relationship between Russia and the West since at least the thirteenth century, after the Tatar-Mongol invasion: “Then the Kievan Rus sustained losses not so much from the Tatars, but its Western neighbors, who did not miss a chance to take advantage of the weakened Kievan Rus in order to cut off Western Russian lands in Belorussia and Ukraine.”

While the Tatar Yoke left a significant imprint on the Kievan state, now traceable, for example, in Russian language and, more importantly, the Russian state tradition, Nashi blames the West for Russia’s misfortunes. As soon as the West felt its technological and military superiority over Russia, the former purportedly started to nourish an idea and make attempts to conquer the latter. Making repeated references to the Time of Troubles, Napoleon’s and Hitler’s invasions, as well as the turbulent period of the early 1990s, Nashi insists, quite fairly in this case, that the

---

95 Morrison n.pag. While it is fair to say that Russia’s North Caucasus policy ensured many ethnic nationalist issues in the region, it is also necessary to admit that, unlike the First Chechen War (1994-1996), the Second Chechen War (1999-2009) and the insurgency period that followed it, including the 2010 Moscow metro bombings, was associated more with Islamic extremism, than with a national liberation movement. On the history and for the analyses of separatist and terrorist phenomena in the Caucasus, see Chivers and Lee Myers; Gilligan; Markedonov; Pokalova.

96 “Manifesto” n.pag.

97 “Manifesto” n.pag.

98 On Mongol influence on Russian social, political and cultural practices, see Ostrowski, “Muscovy and the Mongols”; Ostrowski, “The Mongols and Rus”; Halperin; Hunter, Jeffrey, and Melikishvili.
West’s threat to Russia “has been chronic since the thirteenth century, [and] has been made more serious with the outbreak of the technological revolution in the West.”

Military encounters with national others, indeed, greatly contribute to shaping up any national idea, which is usually demonstrated in the celebratory repertoire of a state. In Russia, as noted, National Unity Day is observed on November 4, on which day in the year 1612 “multinational Russia defeated [Polish] invaders and ended the [turbulent] Time of Troubles,” while annual parades commemorating the Soviet Union’s victory over Nazi Germany on May 9 honor “the victories that we owe to our unity as a people.” As Hosking argues, during and immediately after the Great Patriotic War the dominant national idea even crystallized into a comic national fantasy, and later “this fresh-minted civic patriotism was squashed by Stalin and the Communist party.”

Most often, however, Russia’s victories and losses have been viewed tragically - as a sign that Russia is always under siege: “Napoleon and Hitler dreamt of affirming their power over Russia. Today the U.S., on the one hand, and international terrorism, on the other, aspire to assume control over Eurasia. They have fastened their eyes on Russia. To defend the sovereignty of our country, just like our forefathers did 60 years ago, is the task of our generation.”

The Russians, as Nashi contends, must also learn from their losses, the most traumatic of which was arguably the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Revoicing Putin’s well known statement that the break-up of the USSR was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [20th] century,” Nashi nevertheless admits that the “Communist project brought the USSR into a stalemate.”

99 “Manifesto” n.pag. Here Nashi cites, albeit in a somewhat loose manner, British historian Arnold J. Toynbee. The original text of Toynbee’s lecture on Russia and the West is as follows: “During the last few centuries, this threat to Russia from the west, which has been a constant threat from the thirteenth century till 1945, has been made more serious for Russia by the outbreak, in the west, of a technological revolution which has become chronic and which does not yet show any signs of abating.” Toynbee 3-4.

100 “We Need an Answer” n.pag.; “Everybody Is a Friend” n.pag.

101 Hosking, “Russia and the Russians” 505.

102 “Manifesto” n.pag.
because “under the Soviet regime the country did not prosper, society did not develop dynamically, and people were not free. Moreover, an ideologically driven approach to economy doomed our country to a persistent gap with developed countries.”103 Engaging in a rare moment of self-reflection, as it may seem at first, the youth group admits that “the West often served as an example of reforms in various spheres of public life,” most notably when post-Soviet Russia attempted to transition from a centrally planned economy to a free market economy.104 Yet, in light of the devastating results of the neo-liberal “shock therapy” policy, which was enthusiastically supported by the West and such institutions as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, *Nashi*, just like many Russians, believe that the West can no longer lead by example. This sentiment, lacking humility and responsibility for Russia’s own misfortune, together with, as the analysis reveals, the group’s disregard for individual rights and freedoms despite claiming otherwise on occasion, becomes an element of *Nashi*’s principally tragic worldview.

Shifting the blame for the costs and disappointments of the post-Soviet economic reforms in entirety to the West, the youth group is adamant that what the West attempted to force the country into was the “regime of oligarchic capitalism” as “an extension of animal world, where everybody fights everyone else, where, being unburdened by moral or legal considerations, the strong wins.”105 The neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s indeed left a large part of the Russian population in poverty, while creating “a powerful small circle of fabulously wealthy business elites,” comprised of those who by means of deceit and corruption gained access to formerly

---

103 “Manifesto” n.pag. As Leon Aron argues, the USSR collapsed the way it did because most people were no longer able to experience humiliation by lawlessness, corruption and lack of political and spiritual freedom. See Aron, “Everything You Think You Know”; Aron, “Roads to the Temple”; Stiglitz, “Who Lost Russia?”; Evans, “The Failure of Democratization in Russia.”
104 “Manifesto” n.pag.
105 “Manifesto” n.pag.
state-owned enterprises or, in Nashi’s words, “offshore aristocracy: people who, like the pre-Revolutionary nobility, earn income in Russia, but prefer to spend it and keep it in other countries, mostly in offshore accounts.” Still these young “patriots” are not being anything but deceitful about the nature of the regime they vowed to fearlessly protect.

As numerous critics of the Kremlin’s regime claim, providing at times fairly convincing theories and evidence, modern Russia exemplifies a kind of “‘mafia’ system [as] a merger of bandits and the state.” Alexey Navalny, Russian oppositional leader and head of the Russia-based Anti-corruption Foundation (FBK), for instance, has published a number of chilling investigative reports that document the close ties between Yuri Chaika, Russian Prosecutor General and Putin’s closest ally, and the Tsapok gang, one of Russia’s most notorious criminal gangs. Besides, Navalny on a regular basis unveils how Russian government officials and their families routinely exploit their access to the state’s power and coffers to be able to amass enormous wealth. Navalny is not the only to provide tangible proofs in support of an already widely popular presumption that in Russia the political, business and organized crime interests undoubtedly intersect. In May of 2016, following a decade-long investigation into the activities of Russia’s largest gangs – the Tambov and the Malyshev crime families, suspected of murders, extortion, money laundering, arms and drug trafficking on the territory of Spain – a Spanish national court judge issued international arrest warrants for several high ranking Russian officials, who allegedly belong to Putin’s circle. Later, in September, yet another corruption scandal

---

106 Appel 104. Also see Evans, “The Failure of Democratization in Russia.” Whose fault?
107 Galperovich n.pag. Also see Dawisha; Harding, Expelled; Harding, Mafia State;
109 Among the charged Russian top officials are Vladislav Reznik, former Deputy Chairman of the United Russia party and Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Finances; Dmitry Kozak, Deputy Prime Minister; Viktor Zubkov, former Prime Minister and former First Deputy Prime Minister; Anatoly Serdyukov, former Defense Minister; Igor Sobolevsky, former deputy head of the Investigative Committee (analogous to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)); Leonid Reiman, former Information Technology Minister; General Nikolay Aulov, Deputy Head of the Federal Drug Control Service (analogous to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA))
broke out to reveal how far-reaching the state-run money-laundering infrastructure is in Russia. According to the documents leaked from a Panama-based law firm, there are apparently connections between $230 million that were stolen from the Russian treasury in a massive tax fraud scheme, which involved Russian officials, the police, bankers and the Russian mafia, and the funds received from an offshore company by cellist and Putin’s best friend Sergei Roldugin.

Unwilling to admit that Putin’s regime is the very system of “corrupt bureaucracy” and “oligarchic capitalism [as] the privatization of the state by a bunch of moneybags and bureaucrats,” which “casts the nation into criminal mayhem,” Nashi continues to see the supposed vestiges of “the period of chaos and anarchy of the 1990s” in the present attempts of the West to urge democratic changes in Russia, rather than in the politics of the Kremlin:

“[u]nder the pretense of external aid to democratization, ‘colorful revolutions’ have become an instrument of competition; with the help of this instrument various oligarchic clans, however, do

and a former KGB colleague of Putin. See Berwick; Coalson and Rezunkov; Luhn and Harding; “Spain Issues Warrants.”

The mentioned tax scam was uncovered by Russian tax lawyer Sergey Magnitsky, who was charged with the very tax fraud and jailed. Magnitsky was mistreated, abused and denied medical treatment, which all contributed to his death. Magnitsky was convicted posthumously. While the circumstances of his death were investigated, nobody was charged or arrested. Instead, many of those involved in the fraud case were promoted and granted awards. Sponsored by U.S. Senator Ben Cardin, the Magnitsky Act, formally known as the Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012 and signed into law by President Obama, imposes sanctions on the Russian officials responsible for the violation of Magnitsky’s human rights and his subsequent death. In 2015 the Magnitsky Act was extended into the Global Magnitsky Act to prevent all “responsible for...gross violations of internationally recognized human rights committed against individuals in any foreign country seeking to expose illegal activity carried out by government officials, or to obtain, exercise, or promote human rights and freedoms” from entering the U.S. and accessing American financial institutions. In response to the Magnitsky Act, Russia adopted the law “On Sanctions for Individuals Violating Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Citizens of the Russian Federation,” better known as the Dima Yakovlev law, named after a Russian toddler who died having been locked in a hot car by his adoptive American father. In addition to placing sanctions on American citizens who “are implicated in the violation of basic human rights and freedoms” and “crimes toward citizens of the Russian Federation,” the Dima Yakovlev law bans adoptions of Russian children by American citizens, as well as indicates that a foreign or intentional non-governmental organization may be deemed undesirable if it compromises the safety and interests of the Russian state. “S.284 - Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act” n.pag.; “Full Transcript of the Dima Yakovlev Law” n.pag. Also see Belton; Bernstein et al.; Bridge; Elder, “Sergei Magnitsky Verdict”; Grieboski; Lally; Osborn; “Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal”; Schreck; Tsvetkova and Gutterman.
not promote democracy, but attempt to redistribute property and power.”¹¹¹ In other words, pro-Kremlin “anti-fascists” see aspirations for political liberalization in light of Russia’s unfortunate transition to democracy; that is, a decade of economic and social devastation that the neoliberal reforms, together with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, wrought on the Russians, is viewed as a yearning for “the freedom to rob and kill.”¹¹² As Nashi explains further, “[a]rmies of terrorists were roaming the streets, and oligarchs…carved out their fortunes during the time when Putin was not the head of Russia,” thus leading one to believe that a strong state power serves as a deterrent to “oligarchic capitalism” and “guarantee[s] progress, freedom, and justice in Russia.”¹¹³

Addressing the West and Russian liberal politicians, whom Nashi sarcastically calls “freedom fighters,” group activists passionately declare that “[the former] will not like any leader of the Russian state who does not betray its interests…. [They] will [always] love Judahs and hate apostles of a strong state,” like, for instance, “Stalin, who made our country a great power and saved the world from fascism,” and Putin, who has fought successfully the “two ills that plague Russia: terrorism and the force that wants to destroy the country from within,” pointing to anybody, including Russian neo-fascist, non-Russian nationalist or separatist, as well as liberal voices, who opposes the trajectory of the Kremlin’s regime (albeit for different reasons).¹¹⁴ Resorting to religiously inspired rhetoric, Nashi raises the strong state leader to the status of a divine-like master, whose despotic power is considered to be proportional to his ability to save Russia from a “colorful revolution” as “a geopolitical project of placing [the] country under external control,” and thereby to preserve the supposedly authentic Russian national spirit of

¹¹¹ “Manifesto” n. pag.
¹¹² “Nikolay Starikov” n.pag.
¹¹³ “Manifesto” n. pag.
¹¹⁴ “Nikolay Starikov” n.pag.
“liberal patriot[ism].”\textsuperscript{115} Previous attempts to bring Russia to submission – during the Second World War and purportedly the transition period of 1990s – failed, giving Nashi’s confidence, as well as remembrance ammunition, to counter modern “orange revolutions.”

As Nashi explains further:

The ideal of freedom presupposes the existence of the following universal human aspirations: the aspiration for personal freedom and the aspiration for state sovereignty. Until now these two freedoms were set against each other. Liberals are ready to sacrifice the country’s independence for the sake of personal freedom. Communists and fascists are eager to sacrifice personal freedom for the sake of a glorious state. For us…[p]ersonal freedom and national sovereignty are the two sides of the same coin. Therefore a strong independent Russian state is a necessary condition of freedom, just as democracy and a market economy are its fundamental prerequisites.\textsuperscript{116}

While attempting to strike a balance between personal freedom and state sovereignty, Nashi, however, demonstrates that “personal freedom [of citizens] in independent Russia” is always secondary to and thus restricted by the interests of the state as defined by the Kremlin.\textsuperscript{117} Nashi’s interpretation of the meaning of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transition period of the 1990s as the most recent traumatic moment in Russian history, together with the dramatic experience of World War II, then exposes the critical gap between the paradigms of Western liberal democracy, the values of which, according to Nashi, can only weaken Russia, and strong

\textsuperscript{115} In most cases the word “liberal” is employed, often in a derogatory manner, to describe one’s preference for Western liberal democracy. On one occasion, however, Nashi uses the word “liberal” to refer to the group’s activists as “Russian liberal patriots,” noting that “[t]he issue of sovereignty is where [Nashi activists] diverge from liberals.” “Manifesto” n. pag.

\textsuperscript{116} “Manifesto” n. pag.

\textsuperscript{117} “Manifesto” n. pag.
state leadership, which ensures the existence of “the democratic, lawful, functional federative [Russian] state.”

“Sincere patriots” contend that “[t]he idea of the right of nations to self-determination is the result of Russia’s victory over fascism,” failing, however, to admit that the defeat of Nazism, first of all, should have equally reaffirmed appreciation for human and civil rights and freedoms. While continuing to insist that “[o]n the global scale this victory became an impulse to the break-up of colonial empires and to the start the national liberation of dozens of countries and nations,” as well as applauding the Soviet Union, which “was the first country in the world to declare [in 1917] the principle of national self-determination as foundational of its politics,” pro-Kremlin activists, however, stretch the truth. In contrast to the claims laid out in Nashi’s “Manifesto” that Russia “between the 1980s and 1990s granted Eastern European nations that had hosted Soviet troops since 1940s the right to decide their own destiny” and “on its own accord united [East and West] Germany” in 1990, neither before the Second World War nor after it Russia willingly parted with any of the nations that comprised the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union or were within the Russia’s sphere of influence. The celebrated legacy of the Great Victory then is not the legacy of cooperation among generally comic countries for the sake of “peace, love and friendship,” of the world united in its rejection of an ultimate tragic force. Instead, it is the legacy of the post-World War II world divided into the Western and Soviet (and now Russian) spheres of influence at the Yalta Conference in 1945. It is therefore not entirely surprising that in the very same “Manifesto” Nashi both insists on the idea of sovereignty of a

---

118 “Manifesto” n. pag. See also “Nikolay Starikov.”
119 “Manifesto” n. pag.
120 “Manifesto” n. pag.
121 In the same vein, Nashi insists that “Russia on a unilateral basis refused to take part in the Cold War” and “all by itself destroyed the bastion of Communist ideology.” “Manifesto” n. pag.
122 “Manifesto” n.pag.
state and “the equality of rights of large and small nations,” and it believes that “within their spheres of influence both [the USSR and the U.S.] without hesitation resorted to violence in order to settle a conflict and stabilize a situation” as a normal foreign policy practice.\footnote{123}

In addition to the displayed hypocrisy, the apparent contradiction in Nashi’s national fantasy, however, can be understood by directing attention once again to the notion of sobornost, conceived and promoted as a defining feature of Russianness. Nashi’s idea of individual liberty that is curiously blended into the concept of the collective is based on nothing other than the religiously inspired vision of individual freedom voluntarily subordinated to the will of the whole community. Said otherwise, the freedom of individual Russian citizens or neighboring smaller nations is bound by the limits of the so-called Russian World. As such Nashi’s national fantasy echoes Heinrich von Treitschke’s “hypothesis of the State as power, constrained to maintain itself as such within and without, and of man’s highest, noblest destiny being cooperation in this duty,” and his claim that “the state is not to be judged by the standards which apply to individuals, but by those which are set for it by its own nature and ultimate aims.”\footnote{124} It is peculiar that the Russian Orthodox notion of the harmonious reconciliation of the conflict between the individual and the collective does not only dovetail von Treitschke’s neo-Machiavellian political realism, but also sits well with a consideration of the national question within the framework of Marxist political idealism.\footnote{125} Just as Stalin advocated for “the complete democratization of the country,” which he saw as an unfettered proliferation of ethnic national interests\footnote{126} only if they were not at variance with the programme of Social-Democracy in the Soviet

\footnote{123}“Manifesto” n.pag.\footnote{124} von Treitschke 99.\footnote{125} While Machiavelli, whose name is most often associated with the tenets of Realpolitik, did not deny the immorality of unconditional aspirations for political power, von Treitschke offered to distinguish between private and public, or state, morality and to consider the latter as a completely distinct and yet supreme type of moral action, thus pushing political realism to even further extremes. See Bew; Machiavelli.
Union, so *Nashi* as the self-defined democratic and anti-fascist youth group vouches to assert the rights and freedoms of Russia’s citizens and neighbors, however, with an implicit caveat that those liberties do not pose a threat to Russia’s sovereignty.

The startling agreement between the ideas of the country’s independence and what amounts to be the conditional freedom of its citizens or neighbors then helps us to comprehend how anybody who threatens the Kremlin’s regime and, by extension, Russia’s sovereignty is considered to be adhering to a hostile and even “inhumane ideology,” as well as what the modern Russian civil society moved by the traditional Russian “multiculturalism” truly looks like. While I save the consideration of what *Nashi* sees as the civic foundation of Russian national identity and arguably a boisterous civil society for the next section, I must first discuss how Russia’s adversaries come to be seen as “terrorists” and “fascists” sponsored and often controlled by the West, which, as I demonstrated so far, is treated as the most ferocious and perfidious national other.

Speaking of international terrorism, which for *Nashi* is most often associated with separatist aspirations in the North Caucasus, the group insists that “large-scale terror came to Russia together with the chaos and decay,” brought about by the Western-inspired democratic reforms of the 1990s. Young “patriots” also point out that the West continues to brazenly intervene in the internal politics of other countries in hopes of causing instability and benefit from it:

The result of [the U.S.] victory [in Lybia] will be Gaddafi’s death or his extrajudicial execution (while even Nazis were able to stand trial), the appearance of a loyal leader, who is, however, neither talented nor charismatic, the takeover

---

126 “Saratov” n.pag.
127 “Nikolay Starikov” n.pag.
of oil wells, the long-term presence of [U.S.] military forces. Living standards will drop, crime, insurgency and terrorism will flourish, without legal sources of income the population will engage in either drug trafficking or serve the West’s oil interests.\textsuperscript{128}

While the U.S. and Western Europe, as the group admits, may not directly sponsor terrorist activities, \textit{Nashi} concludes that “[b]y criticizing [Russia’s] insufficiently delicate methods in its fight with enemies, [Western countries] in effect have become the allies of international terrorism.”\textsuperscript{129} Making a reference to the strong Western condemnation of Russia’s military tactics in Chechnya, which involved indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas (and thus caused heavy civilian casualties) and other war crimes, \textit{Nashi} emphasizes that anybody who questions Russia’s sovereignty and its right to defend it by any means necessary is as evil and barbarous as the purported terrorists in Russia’s Caucasus.\textsuperscript{130} It is noteworthy, however, that while \textit{Nashi} does not see the Kremlin’s ruthless military tactics employed during both Chechen wars as problematic, group activists nevertheless condemn the West for its supposed involvement in extrajudicial actions in Libya and other countries.

Compared to its “anti-terrorist” rhetoric, \textit{Nashi} has been much less straightforward in connecting Western countries, most of which were the Allies fighting the Axis powers in the Second World War, to their “fascist” politics. However, as a thorough analysis of \textit{Nashi}’s rhetoric reveals, for pro-Kremlin activists “the fight with fascism today is…the fight for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Russia.”\textsuperscript{131} More specifically, \textit{Nashi} draws parallels between “Hitler’s fascism as an attempt to exterminate or enslave whole nations” and the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[128] “Intervention” n.pag.
\item[129] “Manifesto” n.pag.
\item[130] See “War Crimes in Chechnya and the Response of the West.”
\item[131] “Manifesto” n.pag.
\end{footnotes}
supposedly aggressive agenda of the U.S., as it is demonstrated in the country’s “claims for
exceptionalism and global leadership,” attempts to “augment [its] power over Russia,” to “make
Russians] put up with the role of untermensch or subhumans in [their] own country,” to “[sneer]
at Russia, [to laugh] and [spit] at it from TV screens,” as well as in the West’s “thoughtless
[literal] politics that offends the national dignity of Russian people.” Besides, as Nashi hints,
the U.S. was not even a genuine ally during the Second World War, since the latter “hope[d] to
hide out on the other shore,” using the Second World War for its own economic gain, and “only
on June 6, 1944, less than a year before the end of the war, the U.S. and the Great Britain opened
up a second front in Europe.”

As I will demonstrate in more detail in the following section, Nashi sees Russia as an
uncontested contender for global leadership, and any doubt about that or what “sincere patriots”
regard as an attempt to “spread dismay, anxiety, and hatred of [their] own country” among
Russians is perceived as the attack that is not less alarming and vicious than a fascist or, for that
matter, terrorist act. Even “a fight with the memory of those who perished during the [Great
Patriotic] War,” which Nashi discerns in the decision of the Estonian government to relocate the
Bronze Soldier of Tallinn in 2007, and the demolition of another Soviet World War II memorial
in Georgia in 2009, is denounced as “fascism, an attempt to efface the feat of thousands of our
heroic compatriots from the memory of our nations” and to contest, as implied in Nashi’s
national fantasy, the post-War division of spheres of influence. In sum, all those who

---

132 To be more precise, here Nashi says “the national dignity of the various peoples that live in the Russian Federation.” “Saratov” n.pag.; “Manifesto” n. pag.; “If It Is Not Extremism” n.pag.; “Nikolay Starikov” n.pag.
133 “War Makes” n.pag.; “Manifesto” n.pag.
134 “Nikolay Starikov” n.pag.
135 “Nashi Demands” n.pag. In December of 2009, Georgia’s President Mikheil Saakashvili ordered to remove the Glory Memorial in the country’s second-largest city Kutaisi, hoping to build a new parliament building on its site. Initially being a highly controversial decision, the demolition resulted in the accidental deaths of two locals. Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Sergey Ivanov reportedly compared Saakashvili’s regime with the Taliban.
purportedly want to harm Russia whether by launching a military offensive, by denigrating Russia’s achievements, questioning its role in the post-World War II world, disputing its potential or simply criticizing the Kremlin, are decidedly characterized as terrorists and “extremist[s]... of liberal and fascist ideology” or at best their allies.\textsuperscript{136}

Having painted a picture of the ultimately tragic national other, \textit{Nashi}, however, does not see the U.S. as an intimidating opponent. In fact, in the eyes of \textit{Nashi} activists, the U.S. is a burlesque character. After all, what is a better way to discredit the enemy than to portray them as weak, cowardly, half-witted and even deranged? First, as the youth group suggests, the U.S. is overwhelmed by a wide range of internal problems: “The middle class in the U.S. has been having the hardest time since the 1950s”; “the U.S. deals with a range of territorial disputes,” including those with Mexico, Haiti, and “the history of the Alaska purchase is rather murky”; “the U.S. has the record numbers of incarcerated”; the country cannot manage an influx of migrant laborers; “[x]enophobia and racism are widespread in the U.S.”\textsuperscript{137} Second, similar to the sentiment put forward by Russian neo-fascists, the youth group explains the economic and technological advancement of the U.S. with the country’s unfathomably unfair luck or deceitful politics. Thus, for instance, arguing that the Second World War did not happen on the U.S. territory, \textit{Nashi} activists reveal that the sacrifice of Russians was “the [true] cost of [American] well-being.”\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Nashi} activists also insist that “the technologies that the West passes over to [Russia] are pernicious for the [latter], and the U.S. and Europe are not interested in Russia being strong.”\textsuperscript{139} Everything that the U.S. exports to Russia is purportedly low grade, “be it fast food or

\textsuperscript{136} “Manifesto” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{137} “War Makes” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{138} “War Makes” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{139} “Manifesto” n.pag.
much vaunted American democracy.” Finally, Americans arguably suffer from being ignorant and overweight, or, as Nashi puts it in the manner that the American people have been commonly described in Russia since the mid-1990s, “stupid and fat.”

As the market-oriented reforms in the early 1990s drove Russia into a precarious economic situation, the attitudes of hope for and fascination with the West that Russians adopted with the collapse of the Soviet Union gave way to a generally growing suspicion of and hostility toward the U.S. and Europe. Under the deteriorating economic circumstances, Russians were left with nothing but to jeer at the supposedly half-witted nation, which, to the utmost astonishment of the former, has been arguably enjoying itself to the fullest, as it is evident from Nashi’s references to the West’s supposedly rampant materialism. Nashi’s then picked up on the already prominent topic of the purported asininity of the American people. Treading in the steps of popular Russian stand-up comedian Mikhail Zadornov, who made a fairly successful career of his performance routines targeting supposedly absurd American everyday practices and obscure U.S. laws, Nashi organized a public action, aiming to make Russians realize that “Russian laws are worthy of respect,” especially in comparison with the U.S. laws: “In fact, instead of solving its serious problems, America functions in accordance with very absurd and funny laws.” The youth group also pokes fun at “awkward photograph[s]” and the “lower than average intelligence” of George W. Bush, “the manners of power-wielding despot” John McCain, as well as other U.S. and other Western European political leaders who “in attempts to reach their goals go not only beyond the law, but also, in general, common sense.”

140 “Manifesto” n.pag.
142 “Manifesto” n.pag. Both Zadornov and Nashi do not research whether the odd U.S. laws they refer to are current or have ever existed, as well as the context that may explicate a particular law, thus often paving a way to misinterpretation.
143 “Manifesto” n.pag.
Without making any attempt to truly understand the psychological subtleties that drive the behavior of the national other, which, as I mentioned in Chapter Three, is a characteristic feature of the tragic burlesque, \textit{Nashi} suggests that U.S. officials may even suffer from some mental disorders. For example, when McCain passed a word of warning to Putin that “[t]he Arab Spring is coming to a neighborhood near you,” \textit{Nashi} organized a series of burlesque protests at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. They presented the U.S. politician with a huge lollipop so he could “stop his mouth” with it, and explained McCain’s remarks as “the result of severe head traumas suffered in Vietnam,” thus becoming a perfect prelude to Putin’s response that “Mr. McCain was captured and they kept him not just in prison, but in a pit for several years. Anyone [in his place] would go nuts.” By taking the appeal to ridicule as a fallacious tactic of replacing logical argument with mockery of the opponent, which is native of the burlesque, even further, the youth group also argues that “Senator McCain’s statements…demonstrate his state of extreme arousal.” As a result, \textit{Nashi} activists suggest that “the American politician follow the old saying ‘Make love, not war’ and promise that “if, due to his age, that does not work,…[to give] him Viagra for his birthday.”

As the youth group concludes in a sweeping manner, “American hostility toward Russia has acquired a paranoid character.” In reality, however, a burlesque tactic of interpreting the actions of the national other in an overexaggerated and necessarily unflattering manner amplifies a conspiratorial mode of thinking, or paranoid logic, that the tragic national subject so often resorts to. By refusing to give the national other the benefit of the doubt, the tragically burlesque national subject interprets every rhetorical event as an unequivocal proof of the national other’s

\footnote{144 “Stal” n.pag.; “Nashi Came” n.pag.; Spillius n.pag. Putin also offered a theory that since “Mr McCain fought in Vietnam…[and] has enough blood of peaceful citizens on his hands. It must be impossible for him to live without these disgusting scenes anymore.”}
\footnote{145 “Manifesto” n.pag.}
inadequacy and inferiority: Nashi’s national enemy, for example, is depicted as powerless, foolish, insane, impotent and, as I illustrate below, cowardly.

Before it is too late, Nashi “patriots” suggest American leaders come to their senses: “The U.S. apparently is not scared of repeating the scenario of Hitler’s campaign. They probably hope to hide out on the other shore, as they did during the two World Wars....With modern arms the consequences will be even more horrible. Is the U.S. ready to account for its words?”146 As the youth group immediately adds, only to emphasize the purported cowardice and snaky cunning of the U.S., “[t]he U.S. was very careful to join the war [against Germany] only when it was time to share the victory (and they ‘successfully’ shared it with us, and, as it turns out, it is them who overcame fascism).”147 By dwarfing the supposed national enemy’s might and valor, the youth group, however, does not intend to soften its resolutely tragic attitude toward the U.S. in particular and the West in general as an inhumane war monger. The tragically marked burlesque allows Nashi to rhetorically play down the ultimate national enemy’s ability, rather than the intention, to harm Russia.

What the ultimate national other supposedly lacks in power, it compensates with a considerable number of allies: the U.S. has purportedly recruited West-leaning governments of former Soviet republics and a whole army of Russian liberal politicians and human rights activists, who in a decisively tragic manner are called “paid provocateur[s],” “Judahs,” “public enem[ies],” revengeful “Russophobes,” “who hail bandits and terrorists that killed Russian soldiers in the Caucasus region as ‘heroes’, separatists who call for the disintegration of the country and openly work for the American government,” and whom later in his key annual

146 “War Makes” n.pag.
147 “War Makes” n.pag.
speech Putin referred infamously to as “a fifth column” and “national traitors.” In the eyes of pro-Putin “anti-fascists,” human rights activists and “[Russian] liberal politicians like Garry Kasparov, Vladimir Ryzhkov, Boris Nemtsov are certainly neither fascists nor terrorists. But for them the external control over Russia is progress, for us it is defeat. The problem of Russia’s sovereignty is the main issue that divides us from liberals.” However, as the analysis of Nashi’s national fantasy demonstrates, the group has many more reservations about Russian liberal politicians than it has expressed in its Manifesto quoted above. The “radical” liberalism of the latter allows Nashi to put Russian “pseudo-liberals” on par with right wing extremism or terrorism.

Thus, for example, “sincere patriots” are outraged by veteran liberal politician Boris Nemtsov’s list of “those who are responsible for stifling civil rights, liberties, and Constitution,” calling it none other than a “hit list” of “those, against whom [liberals] plan to take revenge as soon as they ruin Russia.” It is also noteworthy that the youth group dubs Nemtsov a “False Dmitriy [who] deliberately spreads discord in the country.” By referring to the historic figure of a Polish-backed impostor, who was the Tsar of Russia briefly during the Times of Troubles, which ended with a popular and victorious Russian uprising against Polish invaders, Nashi keeps drawing parallels between Russia’s past and present and warns Russian liberal opposition of a similar fate.

---

149 “Manifesto” n.pag.
150 “If It Is Not Extremism” n.pag.
151 “Manifesto” n.pag.; Nemtsov, “The List of Scoundrels” n.pag.; “Hit Lists of Liberals” n.pag. See also Nemtsov, “At the U.S. Congress.” Nemtsov’s list was compiled in the aftermath of Magnitsky’s death and contributed to the introduction of sanctions against Russian officials.
152 “We Do Not Like to Borrow” n.pag. Nemtsov served as President Boris Yeltsin’s Deputy Prime Minister and was a vocal critique of Putin’s regime and Putin’s protégé and President of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov, who might have ordered Nemtsov’s assassination near the Kremlin in February 2015.
153 There were three pretenders who claimed to be the youngest son of Ivan the Terrible and thus laid claims to the Russian throne during the Times of Trouble. The turbulent period of Russian history ended with the uprising led by Kuzma Minin and Dmitry Pozharsky, which is now celebrated as the National Unity Day on November 4.
By mocking all those whom Nashi also call “petty [criminals],” “little-known politician[s]-provocateur[s],” “small and harmful [insects],” “endangered species,” “Rocinante [Don Quixote’s horse] with broken legs and a torn-off tail,” liars, spenders and philanderers, the youth groups aims not only to intimidate anybody who is critical of the Kremlin’s regime, but also to discredit genuinely oppositional liberal voices in Russia.\textsuperscript{154} When, as Nashi “patriots” recommend, the U.S takes their “freelancers” and “the State Department’s pet[s],” back to America, then the “farce that has nothing to do with the real…expression of citizens’ will” will give way to the true Russian civil society.\textsuperscript{155} What kind of civil society and political culture the youth group offers in exchange for the Western model of liberal democracy and the values of democratic civil society, which seem far too alien to Nashi “patriots,” is discussed in the next section.

\textit{Nashi} rightfully points to the ethically problematic alliance that existed between national liberation movements in Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and the authorities of Nazi Germany, thus emphasizing that modern Ukrainian and Baltic nationalisms have been compromised by the memory of collaboration with the Nazis, as well as expresses legitimate indignation at, for example, Latvia’s attempts to commemorate soldiers of the Latvian Legion, which was a part of the Waffen-SS. Pro-Putin “patriots,” however, often take their accusations of state fascism of Ukraine and the Baltic countries, which will purportedly result in “[b]ombings, genocide, death camps,” too far.\textsuperscript{156} For example, \textit{Nashi} decries the relocation of the Bronze Soldier in Estonia, as well as other Soviet-era World War II memorials in former Soviet

\textsuperscript{154} “Nashi Offered” n.pag.; “Sergey” n.pag.; “Insect Net” n.pag.; “Kaluga” n.pag.; “Nikita” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{155} “We” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{156} “ConSSonance March” n.pag.
republics, calling it “not only illegal, but also a crime against the Russian people.” Russian “patriots” also bemoan that “[t]he genocide of the Russian speaking population is happening in Estonia,” and some other former Soviet republics, where “nationalists attempt to build an ethnically homogenous state and want to assimilate representatives of other, non-titular nations, which at fate’s whim happened to live in [those] countr[ies].” Finally, Nashi anti-fascists fret about “reprisals” taken by the Estonian government on those who “defended us, defended peace, defended the Bronze Soldier,” and the group’s activists who intended to participate in protests against the relocation of the monument in Tallinn, but were “not let in Estonia on tourists visas . . . [having been deemed] ‘a threat to Estonia’s national security’.” Indeed, the issue of commemoration of SS soldiers and veterans in the Baltic region and less so in Ukraine is not to be ignored. Similarly, according to the Amnesty International, in some former Soviet republics “[p]eople belonging to a [Russian-speaking linguistic] minority enjoy very limited linguistic and minority rights, and often find themselves de facto excluded from the labour market and educational system.” At the same time, Nashi cannot legitimately except Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to embrace the official Russian narrative of the World War II and instead of denouncing the Soviet Union as an invader to view it as liberator. It is reasonable to assume that in light of the history of Russia’s aggressive foreign policy towards the countries within its zone

---

160 “Estonia: Linguistic Minorities” n.pag. The history of the Ukrainian, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian states before and after the Second World War is a story of the nations’ struggle for independence from foreign powers, among which the most persistent were Germany and Russia. See Davoliūtė; Dyczok; Karner and Mertens; Kuzio; Lieven; Motyl, Dilemmas of Independence; Plokhy; Smith et al.; Statiev; Subrenat; Taagepera; Wulf;
of interests, former Soviet republics would be less than eager to welcome hawkish activists on the Kremlin’s payroll in their countries.\textsuperscript{161} Moreover, as the group suggests, major geopolitical players, just like in the last century, understand that such ideologies [like fascism] are an effective geopolitical weapon. Their cultivation in a rivaling country and at its borders is a sure way to weaken an opponent. It is an old proven technique. That is why Europe closes its eye to Baltic fascism, and at the same time helps [fascism] develop also in Russia.\textsuperscript{162}

Yet here, too, Nashi goes overboard by indulging in a conspiracy theory to explain the lack of public concern for the aforementioned problems in the Baltics from Western governments regardless of how regretful and disturbing the West’s reticence in this matter truly is.

Just like their “overseas overloads,” pro-Western politicians and governments of former Soviet republics are “diagnosed” with various mental disorders. Following the relocation of the Bronze Soldier, about 100 of Nashi “patriots,” dressed in white coats and armed with pills, gathered at the Estonian Embassy to “[announce] of the detected mental disorder of the government of Estonia.”\textsuperscript{163} As Nashi continue, “[m]ajor symptoms of madness are, in particular, the removal of monuments to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War, refusals of entry into a country without any explanation, glorification of fascism, trials of veterans [of the Second World War with security and police backgrounds].”\textsuperscript{164} Around the same time, Nashi also expressed its

\textsuperscript{161} For years pro-Putin youth group and the Kremlin have talked about Russia’s commitment to protect the rights of Russian speaking people that live abroad. Considering this particular issue and Russia’s foreign policy in general, the fears of some former Soviet Republics that Russia could invade or at least interfere in the politics of their countries proved to be valid after Russia swiftly annexed Ukraine’s Crimea and started a war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Shortly after the conflict between Ukraine and Russia had broken out, Putin reiterated that “[m]illions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live in Ukraine and will continue to do so. Russia will always defend their interests using political, diplomatic and legal means.” “Transcript: Putin Says” n.pag. See also Walker, “Putin Admits.”

\textsuperscript{162} “ConSSonance March” n.pag.

\textsuperscript{163} “Open Letter to the European Parliament” n.pag.

\textsuperscript{164} “Open Letter to the European Parliament” n.pag.
opinion on the decision of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko to run for a second term by claiming that he lost “elementary brain functions.”¹⁶⁵ Pointing to Yushchenko’s extremely low five percent approval rating, the youth group came up with “three variants of the diagnosis: either [Yushchenko] does not know that he has to have more than half of votes to win the election (mental deficiency), or the digit zero seems to him to appear next to the digit five (paranoia), or he stopped to perceive reality adequately (schizophrenia).”¹⁶⁶ Overall, most Westward leaning neighbors of Russia are portrayed as pitiful slaves to the ultimate national enemy’s will.

An expressively tragic vision of the national other as a perpetrator presupposes a tragically infused elegiac image of the national self. Yet, while Nashi “patriots” are certain that “the messianic philosophy of the U.S. on the international arena” poses a real threat to Russia’s sovereignty, they nevertheless do not consider “the situation … [as] nearly hopeless.”¹⁶⁷ Compared to the tragic elegy of Russian neo-fascists that contributes to a flagrantly apocalyptic idea of the world, Nashi’s plaint is then far more muted. Nashi’s elegiac fantasy-frame is not typical in a sense that it does not “[spread] the disproportion between the weakness of the [national] self and the magnitude of the situation.”¹⁶⁸ On the contrary, speaking about the current balance of forces in the world, the youth group points to “the ambiguity and instability of the U.S. leadership position,” and agrees that “Russia cannot be defeated; neither Napoleon, nor Hitler could do that, and the U.S. will not be able to do that either.”¹⁶⁹ While Nashi adds that [i]f Russia loses the [global] competition, it may perish as did the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire,” the group here expresses not so much an apocalyptically driven

---

¹⁶⁵ “Tula: Neighbors or Enemies” n.pag.
¹⁶⁶ “Tula: Neighbors or Enemies” n.pag.
¹⁶⁷ “Manifesto” n.pag.
¹⁶⁸ Burke, *Attitudes toward History* 44.
¹⁶⁹ “Manifesto” n.pag.
view of the country’s future, but rather accentuates, in an admittedly ambitious manner, the supposedly grand status of Russia, on par with the great empires of the past.170

Before I move into a discussion of the epic frame in Nashi’s psycho-rhetorical narrative, I must point out that the powerlessness that Russia experienced in its recent history. It happened when the USSR took the path of perestroika and glasnost and eventually dissolved, and later when Russia was transitioning to a new type of political and economic system that, as many Russians believe, failed them. As Nashi argues, besides “dismay, anxiety, and hatred of [Russia],” the sense of “weakness…[was] inculcated in [Russians]…under the sweet songs of freedom, perestroika and universal human values.”171 Thus Nashi attempts both to invalidate an authentic expression of anguish that Soviet people felt over ignoble and intolerable life in their unjust and immoral state and to amplify the overwhelming feeling of confusion over the failure of the democratic reforms of the 1990s. This translated into the sweeping anger towards the national other that by its very presence exposed what life in the Soviet Union truly looked like. Whereas, as I noted earlier, pro-Putin activists acknowledge that the Soviet regime drove the country to ruin, they see the problem primarily in its economic and technological delay, dismissing the crucial role of political and civil liberties and freedoms in the betterment of society and the nation as a whole. In sum, Nashi’s elegy, whose tragic nature I am yet to explain, is built around the image of the strength and rightfulness of the national subject and the idea of the waning power of the national enemy – the power that the latter more than makes up for in its deceitfulness and depravity.

When one accepts suffering as inevitable, or, in other words, his/her own imperfectness, mistakenness as intrinsic, elegy acquires comic value. However, when one views suffering or

170 “Manifesto” n.pag.
171 “Nikolay Starikov” n.pag.
weakness as something that should not have happened in the first place, since the national self is supposed to be perfect, elegy approximates Burke’s tragedy. Short of sincere humility, 

*Nashi’s* elegy then is thoroughly tragic. *Nashi* insists that, as it happened during the Second World War, Russia has been undeservingly attacked, and sees the “predatory” practices of the U.S. and its “pugs” as “nothing but betrayal.”

Speaking of the West’s supposed treachery, the group accuses Russia’s “former allies” (as well as Japan as a former Axis Power) of “attempts to revise the results of the [Second World War]” and “cut off our territories.”  

*Nashi*, however, mourns not the West’s pursuit to efface the memory of the joint anti-fascist fight, but the legacy of the Yalta Agreement.

Unlike Putin, who in this matter, oddly enough, has been more straightforward in making Russia’s grievances known to the West, *Nashi’s* narrative contains modest references to Russia’s exasperation, specifically with the West’s purported infringement on the deal made at the February 1945 Yalta Conference and other post-World War II treaties, including the July 1945 Potsdam Declaration and the September 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, as well as promises received on the issue of NATO’s non-expansion eastward with the end of the Cold War, when the problem of European security came once again to the forefront of discussions among global leaders. A sensitive issue, for example, has been U.S. support of Japan in the territorial dispute with Russia over the Kuril Islands, which arose in the aftermath of the Second World War. Being seemingly more distressed by the U.S. taking the side of a former Axis country, rather than by the very territorial claims, *Nashi* declares that the current U.S. position on the issue “cannot even hold up from a legal standpoint and is a political speculation.”

Besides, as *Nashi* continues, “[the U.S.] betrays not only [Russia], but also its own citizens, who fought Japan in the Second

---

172 “Nashi Handed Over” n.pag.; “Get Ready” n.pag.; “Tambov” n.pag.
173 “Nashi Handed Over” n.pag.; 40; “War Makes” n.pag.
174 “Nashi Handed Over” n.pag.
World War…. [The American and Russian] peoples stood by each other in the hour of need. But now the U.S. government decided to betray the memory of the friendship that saved our nations from death.”

Similarly, the youth group sees treachery in the West’s attempts to interfere in political processes, influence civil society and sway election results in Russia and other former Soviet republics through, as Nashi claims, the West’s enthusiastic approval and support of supposedly dangerous, fascist politicians and ideas, as well as “openly hostile regimes in former Soviet republics,” and, finally, by “financing organizations that subvert the Russian regime.” Thus, for example, complaining about British Ambassador Anthony Brenton’s participation in the Other Russia forum – an event organized by a wide coalition of Putin’s opponents, including liberal, far right and far left politicians, Nashi representatives cannot “imagine how a Russian Ambassador in the U.S. gathers representatives of the Ku-Klux Klan, the Black Panther Party and other radicals, promises to help them financially, and then asserts that he held a meeting with representatives of American civil society.”

Although Nashi rightfully questions the willingness of some Russian liberal politicians to enter the opposition alliance with extreme nationalists or even fascists, the youth group, however, jumps at a conclusion that the former, as well as Western governments, share the very ideology of Russian right wing radicals. Further, in concert with the Kremlin, the youth group accuses Russia’s only independent election monitoring group Golos of acting on the instructions of their sponsors - “fanatics from the State Department,” to discredit the results of Russia’s parliamentary elections and in this way stir up anti-government protests. Dismissing the possibility of a genuine objection to electoral fraud

175 “Nashi Handed Over” n.pag.
176 “The U.S. Senate Adopted” n.pag. Also see “Ryazan.”
177 “Vladislav” n.pag.
178 “American Mothers!” n.pag.
in particular and the Kremlin’s politics in general, Nashi thus unfairly portrays any dissent in Russia as foreign influence.\textsuperscript{179} This, in its turn, speaks loud about the nature of Nashi’s version of civil society.

While accusing the West of betrayal, Nashi does not openly speak about it as the mere unfaithfulness of Russia’s national others to what was essentially the cynical international post-war deal, similar to the secret protocols of the earlier Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Instead, the relationship with the West is arguably mired by the latter’s brazen ingratitude:

Today many in the West try to rewrite history and belittle the role of Russia in this war, to besmirch the Russian soldier, who liberated Europe from the yoke of Hitler’s fascism, aimed to exterminate or enslave nations. But we are proud that our grandfathers won. If it was not for them, the whole world today would be living under the awful fascist dictatorship, and many nations would have been exterminated. This is how a country proves its global leadership – by liquidating the most dangerous threat for all of mankind.\textsuperscript{180}

By assuming a high moral position, Nashi depicts Russia as a Jesus-like hero that willingly sacrificed itself for the sake of national others’ freedom and well-being. This purportedly happened during the Second World War, when, thanks to Russia, the U.S was supposedly able to live peacefully and flourish. As Nashi demands in an injured voice, “Americans must know the cost of their prosperity,” which is arguably tens of millions of lost lives of the Russian people and the discernible interruption of Russia’s economic and technological progress.\textsuperscript{181} Further, in the 1990s, “Russia in its own volition renounced Communism and withdrew from the territories

\textsuperscript{179} On electoral fraud in Russia, see Enikolopov et al.; Levitsky and Way; Ross, Cameron; Schedler; Shuster, “In Russia” n.pag.; White and Feklyunina.
\textsuperscript{180} “Manifesto” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{181} “War Makes” n.pag.
under its control.” Nashi does not forget to emphasize that “[f]or Russia this decision turned into a decade-long economic downfall, the break-up of the USSR, an increase in social disparity and ethnic conflicts.” Moreover, during the Chechen Wars “[Russian] officers…with blood washed off [the] mistakes” of “those who speak so much about freedom and democracy.”

Identification with the supreme power and authority of a great empire or a god-like hero leads Nashi to adopt a far from humble attitude – a tragic epic fantasy-frame. By claiming that “[t]he truth about the past must help [Russians] deal with new threats,” Nashi activists argue that modern Russia remains to be the sole protector of true democracy and freedom. It becomes obvious that Nashi uses the words anti-fascist and democratic as synonymous, or at least closely related, ideas. Russia’s anti-fascist past, according to Nashi, predetermines its purportedly democratic present and future. Nashi “patriots” believe that liberal democracy cannot be measured by the “U.S. State Department ratings,” but presents itself as “the rights and freedoms defended by [the] ancestors” of young Russians.

The lack of humility is also discernible in Nashi’s satire, which endows the frame with a tragic accent. While “[e]xpertness in satiric practice makes [comic] inventory almost possible,” Nashi “patriots” fail to utilize the means of comically inspired satire to “exorcize [their] own vanities by building a fire of other people’s vanities.” On the contrary, Nashi insists that most Russians lack self-respect and pride, thereby “[tainting] the image of the ethnic Russians, citizens of Russia.” Having dubbed the summer Work & Travel program, which allows college students to experience U.S. culture while offsetting travel costs through work mainly in a

182 “Manifesto” n.pag.
183 “Manifesto” n.pag.
184 “Nikolay Starikov” n.pag.
185 “Saratov” n.pag. See also “Irina”; “Saratov.”
186 “To My Mind” n.pag.
187 Burke, Attitudes toward History 49.
hospitality business, *Bend the Neck & Travel*, young “patriots” advise Russian students “not go to the U.S to ‘serve napkins to the masters’, to clean their toilets”:

It is not a secret that Russian students are lured to work in the U.S., having been promised a good salary, accommodation, opportunities to travel all over America, but nobody tells them that they can get deceived, or, as they say, ripped off.

Nobody warns them that they will be essentially slaving away all day long.189

Making disparaging statements with regard to the international exchange summer program, *Nashi* goes further to emphasize that, by doing “dirty jobs” as dishwashers, valets, janitors and waiters, Russian students of prestigious universities find themselves in place of migrant workers, which pro-Kremlin activists consider demeaning. Under the slogan “Use your head, rather than using your hands to clean American restrooms!” the group activists held a few events in Russian cities urging Russian students “to respect themselves and their country first,” instead of “wash[ing] dirty clogged toilets after stupid and fat Americans.”190

Rather than acknowledging the decades of the brazen unaccountability of and the intolerable pressure from the government, which precipitated the undignified and humiliating life in the Soviet Union and after its dissolution, *Nashi* activists attribute responsibility for the widespread Russian self-loathing and self-doubt primarily to the West. While claiming, as pointed out above, that Western countries, including the U.S., have persistently and deliberately have been trying to weaken Russia even by instilling an inferiority complex into its citizens, in truth it has been rather merely the presence of the ultimate national other as a preeminent power and a country that boasts of higher living standards, that brought about an array of conflicting

189 “Saransk” n.pag.; “Saint Petersburg” n.pag.
190 “Saint Petersburg” n.pag.
sentiments such as anger, resentment, envy, admiration and a yearning for recognition and respect. Moreover, as Nashi insists, ordinary Russians are to blame too:

Who is guilty of the fact that [Russian] people are morons and do not understand anything, that [Russian] people are absolutely weakwilled and perverted, that they lost self-respect, and yet are eaten up by vanity and consumerism? Indeed, it is Putin’s fault that we litter our forests...; that in [the world’s biggest supermarket located in Moscow] shoppers dig in the rotten produce [on sale] just like pigs, while the store’s owners regard them as such; that we lie all day long, lie to ourselves, our loved ones, kids and parents. It is all Putin’s fault. If so, then Nashi gives out free stickers “It is Putin’s fault.” Come by, take a dozen just in case. If you decide to throw away an empty bottle in the forest, put a sticker on it, throw it and just walk away. Putin will pick it up.191

Relieving Putin of any responsibility for Russia’s problems, which are brought about in no small measure by corruption, lies, and contempt for the average Russian, which the Kremlin and local authorities have been regularly accused of, the Kremlin-backed “anti-fascists” construct an image of the supposedly non-lacking, authentic authority, which functions as the last and only guarantor of identity for the obsessive subject.192 Stated differently, without a sufficient factual, material foundation to ground modern Russia’s claims to global power and authority and to affirm the Russians’ desire to take pride in their country, as well as to exact respect, first of all, from their own government, the Russians invest affectively in the figure of the strong leader whom the former believe or only pretend to believe.193

191 “Russia 2010” n.pag.
192 On Putin’s deceptive rhetoric, see Coynash; Gessen; “Putin’s Lies.”
193 While, according to the Levada polls, most Russians are proud of their country, they are, however, appreciative of achievements of the Soviet era, as well as Russia’s current aggressive foreign policy: the victory in
Unlike the resolutely tragic motives that manifest themselves in a variety of fantasy-frames – tragedy, epic, elegy, satire and the burlesque, the grotesque confusion is evident in Nashi’s national fantasy. In the grotesque, which is often associated with “periods marked by great confusion of the [socio-political and] cultural frame, requiring a radical shift in people’s allegiance to symbols of authority,” one is undecided about how to deal with the enemy - whether to reject it or accept it as it is.194 The incongruity gravitates towards tragedy, when one perceives the other as a nuisance. On the other hands, when the grotesque is closer to comedy, incongruity can actualize its potential to make one view the situation in a new light. Nashi “patriots” resort to incongruity without laughter in order to deal with the traumatic loss of authority over a traditional zone of Russian influence – countries of the Eastern Bloc, which, according to Nashi, are supposed to remain devoted “younger siblings” of Russia, and for which the latter is always “compel[ed]…to be responsible for.”195 Having rejected the pro-Western path of development taken by many of those countries, Nashi’s Russia, however, is not willing to part with those countries. The group explains it by saying hypocritically that “an immediate geopolitical profit, expressed in the money and power of some private individuals, cannot be a measure of the fate of the [nations], bound by thousands of years of history.”196 However, it is enough to look at Russia’s policies, such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Yalta agreement, and Russia’s aggressive actions towards its neighbors, including Russian military intervention in, for example, Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and, more recently,
Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 to see that the country’s geopolitical concerns by far outweigh the supposed fraternity of former Soviet republics.

_Nashi’s_ rhetoric is an obvious reminder of the Soviet rhetoric of “the friendship of the nations,” praising the ideological unity and cultural diversity of the Soviet Union while securing the status of the ethnic Russians as a state-forming people. Rather than genuinely protecting minority rights to cultural and religious identity, _Nashi_ worries about keeping national minorities in Russia and former Soviet republics loyal to the Russian government and subordinate to ethnic Russians, thus reinforcing the image of Russia as a powerful empire. This brings _Nashi’s_ grotesque closer to a tragic kind, just like all other fantasy-frames, including tragedy, elegy, epic, satire, the burlesque and the grotesque, within the group’s psycho-rhetorical narrative. A faint promise of comic self-reflection with regard to Russia’s Soviet history reveals itself as a sham as soon as the close textual reading of _Nashi’s_ psycho-rhetorical narrative discerns the disappointing, yet unsurprising indifference of the “democratic anti-fascist” group towards equality and individual liberties, its preoccupation with the economic and technological modernization of the country. Moving immediately into the next section, I seek to complete the discussion of _Nashi’s_ Russian idea, albeit this time by providing an insight into the group’s national fantasy from another – symbolic, angle.

5.1.2 _Nashi’s_ Competitive “Democracy”

The tragic worldview, which is easily identifiable in _Nashi’s_ Russian idea, becomes even more pronouncedly morose when the psycho-rhetorical narrative in question is evaluated along its Symbolic dimension. The Kremlin’s “anti-fascists” contend that “[g]lobal progress involves
the competition of nations....Those who are satisfied with what has been already achieved are left behind and fade away in world history. This is actually the essence of democracy as a social regime of competition in everything we do.” As the analysis unveils, despite some apparent differences, Nashi’s national fantasy is as tragic as the psycho-rhetorical narrative of Russian neo-fascists. The latter emphasizes conflict as a natural state of relationships among states and as such is in line with the emphasis political realism places on power politics and geopolitical considerations, and the former stresses competition under the circumstances of global anarchy, which yet only in appearance approximates the principles of neoliberal institutionalism. Considering the fact that Russia’s “global leadership will always need to be shored up by an efficient army, reliable and high technology weapons,” because “[t]he weak are disrespected, beaten, and disregarded,” the country’s blatant disregard for the norms of international law and what appears to be a hypocritical disdain for the role of international organizations, as well as the unrestrained indulgence in geopolitics as justification for Russia’s aggressive foreign policy, one may say that Russia is essentially guided by the cynical goal of self-preservation under the disguise of free market-like, unfettered competition.

As Nashi further clarifies, “[n]ormal democracy is precisely the freedom of competition [in economic and military might, and technological development], which is restricted neither by the ideology of universal equality nor by the brute force of state or local criminal

---

197 “Manifesto” n.pag.
198 Anarchy is a foundational term in most theories of international relations (IR), meaning that there is no given, natural power that regulates relations among states, which, in its turn, supposedly invites fairly specific reactions from states, like, for example, power politics. Unlike realism, neorealism, liberalism and neoliberalism, the IR theory of constructivism views anarchy as “what states make of it” in a sense that states respond to the conditions of anarchy in a variety of ways in various circumstances. From a Lacanian point of view, anarchy can be understood as the Real, the impossible “domestication” of which provides the speaking subject with a space to act creatively and ethically. Wendt 395.
199 “Manifesto” n.pag.
dictatorship.” Whereas Russia in appearance promotes principles of the rationally driven competition among individuals states, which can potentially lead to international cooperation for the mutual benefit of states, the national fantasy of youth group, however, presents a fairly bleak picture of today’s world – not just hostile, but also ethically problematic. Although Nashi activists “want citizens of other states to take Russia’s economic lead, want that their interests encourage them to cooperate with Russia,” global competition is arguably “tough and sometimes even cruel. The weak must accept the rules of the game set by the strong and stay in the wake of the latter’s politics, get culturally assimilated. You are either a leader, or a follower, or a victim.” As Russian “anti-fascists” add, “[the strong] call the shots. This is how they secure their victory.” Here Nashi can be heard reminiscing about the bipolar Yalta world order, which other countries had no choice but to accept. Such have been the spoils of Russia’s victory, which, as “anti-fascists” lament, are now being challenged by the West, more specifically, the U.S., which has engaged in a “violent promotion” of the hegemony of oligarchic capitalism in the modern world. Although Nashi makes a point to differentiate freedom and democracy as competition, from the purported permissiveness and lawlessness of Western “oligarchic capitalism…as an extension of animal world, where everybody fights everyone else, where, unburdened by moral or legal considerations, the strong wins,” the former in practice looks much like the latter.

It then leaves no shadow of a doubt that Kremlin-backed “patriots” promote an illiberal variant of global competition that induces coercion rather than inviting cooperation, or rather push for a global hierarchy of nations, despite calling themselves “liberal patriots” and claiming

---

200 “Manifesto” n.pag.
201 “Manifesto” n.pag.
202 “Manifesto” n.pag.
203 “Manifesto” n.pag.
204 “Manifesto” n.pag.
that big and small nations started to enjoy equal rights precisely as a result of Russia’s victory over Nazi Germany. In other words, just like Russian neo-fascists, pro-Putin “anti-fascists” see the world as a contest of distinct Master’s Discourses, which incorporates different systems of values. This means that participants of unfettered global competition make appeals to something other than universal rights and freedoms.

As the analysis of the elegiac and epic frames of Nashi’s national fantasy demonstrates, Russia purportedly is not willing to put up with the role of the follower or the victim. Living under an arguably constant threat of assault and even annihilation from numerous national others, Nashi is proud that Russia has never been the Slave to any Master. Just as in 1945, for example, Russia prevailed - “liquidat[ed] the greatest threat to whole humankind and thereby “assert[ed] its leadership in the world,” now the Russians are facing threats of a comparable magnitude: international terrorism and renewed fascist sentiments, which have been sponsored and manipulated by the U.S. as the contemporary global dictator, or, in Nashi’s words, “global [hegemon].” Encouraged by the victorious memory of Russia’s fight with Nazi Germany, Russia has arguably got what it takes – the mysterious objet a, to claim its leadership in the world. In other words, as the agent of the Hysteric’s Discourse, Nashi’s Russia challenges the Master, the power of which, as we have seen in the discussion of the burlesque frame in the previous section, is lacking and thereby ludicrous.

Pro-Putin “patriots” are confident that “[they] can build Russia as [they] see it. And this project can change the whole world for the better. Not everybody has this chance in life.” Russia’s claims to global leadership have been arguably backed up with “facts” integrated into

---

205 “Manifesto” n.pag.
206 “Manifesto” n.pag.
207 “Manifesto” n.pag.
208 “Manifesto” n.pag.
“The Modern Political Atlas” – a purportedly scientific project, which “guarantees precision and reliability of the conclusions” about Russia’s role on the global arena.\textsuperscript{209} The “facts” that transform the \textit{objet a} qua secret, or truth, of Russia’s superiority, into something tangible, or Real, as \textit{Nashi} believes, are Russia’s rich natural resources and its possession of a Heartland - “the most geographically advantageous launching ground to exercise control over the world.”\textsuperscript{210}

At the same time, as it transpires from \textit{Nashi}’s psycho-rhetorical narrative, “Russia’s leadership is not to be understood [solely] as its military and political domination over other countries and nations, but [also] as Russia’s global influence, founded on the base of the appeal of Russian culture, mode of life, political, economic and social regime.”\textsuperscript{211} In other words, as pro-Putin “anti-fascists” insist, the rule of global competition, however, hostile it may be, “must have some support, must \textit{seem} to be fair.”\textsuperscript{212} Global competition then is also posited as an “ideological fight,” or “the fight for what can be considered just and unjust.”\textsuperscript{213}

Russia’s major rival in an ideological global competition, as the analysis reveals, is the Western paradigm of liberal democracy. In \textit{Nashi}’s view, the latter is merely a form - an empty structure, or an abstract model, which cannot be simply copied: “Each country, including Russia, must look for its own path to renewal….We can count on the dignified future only if we are able to connect universal principles of market economy and [liberal] democracy with Russia’s reality.”\textsuperscript{214} While pointing out that “[n]ot just any politics can be pursued” in Russia, thus emphasizing the ideological strength of the Russian idea, or the Russian national Master’s Discourse, \textit{Nashi} nevertheless refuses the same advantage to the Western project of liberal

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{209} “Russia’s Place in the World” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{210} “Manifesto” n.pag. See also “Velikiy Novgorod.”
\textsuperscript{211} “Manifesto” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{212} “Manifesto” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{213} “Manifesto” n.pag.
\textsuperscript{214} “Manifesto” n.pag.
\end{footnotesize}
democracy.\footnote{“Manifesto” n.pag.} By doing so, as well as pointing out the purportedly inherent cynicism of the West, the state-sponsored “anti-fascists” strategically mischaracterize the discourse of liberal democracy, which, as a comic variant of the Discourse of the University, cannot be reduced to its form. As such, Nashi’s national fantasy is perfectly aligned with the radically tragic attitude of Russian neo-fascists.

*Nashi* further adds that “[t]he concept of justice has a historical character that has been defined by the living conditions of people.”\footnote{“Manifesto” n.pag.} In Russia, freedom and justice have been traditionally understood in relation to the concept of *sobornost*. This also determined what the Russian ideas of civic nationalism and civil society, as they are interpreted by *Nashi*, now looks like. Unlike Ukraine and the Baltic states, “which understand nation primarily in its ethnic quality,” the Russians, according to the Kremlin-backed group, are a civic nation, although with a certain reservation: “Russia is a state not only for ethnic Russians, but also for every nation that is part of Russia. Concurrently, the ethnic Russians are the state-forming and largest nation of Russia, that is why Russia’s destiny depends on what kind of position the ethnic Russians adopt.”\footnote{“Manifesto” n.pag.} The stipulation, however, brings the Russian nationalist sentiment back to its Soviet and Imperial roots, when Russia’s multiculturalism was welcome up to the point when political demands of non-ethnic Russian nations and groups started to interfere with the interests of the Russian state and the ethnic Russians. Indeed, such is the contemporary “[idea] of racial, religious and cultural unity for the sake of our common Motherland – Russia. The fight with fascism today is the a part of the fight for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Russia.”\footnote{“Manifesto” n.pag.}

The characterization of practices of political expression of non-ethnic Russian sentiments as
fascism dramatically circumscribes the space of freedom for anybody who does not belong to the state-forming nation.

By noting that “cultural diversity is the treasure of society, and the task of the state and civil society is to protect cultural diversity and support various cultures,” Nashi claims to do just that.\(^{219}\) Just like the notion of sobornost as unity in diversity contributed to shaping the practice of Russian multiculturalism, so does it designate Russian civil society as unity in plurality. Both the narrative of multiculturalism and the narrative of civil participation is structured as the discourse of the obsessive: Nashi activists only pretend to believe in the freedom of cultural and political expression, and thus are able to protect the national self from its very impossibility. Instead, it wishes ethnic differences to be forced out of the political sphere, which could have been, perhaps, welcomed if that did not leave ethnic Russians in the exact opposite – politically privileged – position.\(^{220}\)

Both the rhetoric of multiculturalism and civil participation is the rhetoric of mere appearances, or the obsessive’s charade. The “flamboyant,” “creative, brave character” that Nashi attributes to its activism, diverges radically from a creative, or poetic, spark that drives a truly comic, politically significant protest.\(^{221}\) As Burke reminds us, “[a]ction involves character, which involves choice; and the form of choice attains its perfection in the distinction between Yes and No….Though the concept of sheer ‘motion’ is non-ethical, ‘action’ implies the ethical (the human personality).”\(^{222}\) Since the group supports the Kremlin-approved set of ideas and thus promotes the status quo, it is left with nothing but to imitate authentic civic participation and anti-establishment character. For instance, donned in scrubs, several Nashi activists once joined the

\(^{219}\) “Manifesto” n.pag.
\(^{220}\) On the relationship between liberal democracy and civic and ethnic types of national identity, both in the global and Eastern European context see Diamond and Plattner.
\(^{221}\) “Manifesto” n.pag.
\(^{222}\) Burke, Rhetoric of Religion 41.
Dissenters’ March – a Russian oppositional protest, “in order to evaluate the state of mind of its participants,” and were subsequently arrested.\footnote{223} They “even managed to spend some time in a cell,” only to get promptly released as soon as the police found out their affiliation. Carrying out will of its Master, Putin-sponsored \textit{Nashi} is also “fearless” enough to organize an unsanctioned picket to demand the resignation of a police officer who fell out of favor with the Kremlin.\footnote{224} Proud of their “brush” with the law, \textit{Nashi} activists, however, “are not scared to express their views and will continue to guard the interests of [their] country.”\footnote{225}

In addition to the task of “building of effective civil society,” \textit{Nashi} also vouches to nurture a generation of the new Russian “political, economic, and administrative elite”: “modern, highly qualified, competitive, moral, patriotic, and united by the idea of serving their Motherland.”\footnote{226} In short, young “leaders” see the group as “the megaproject of [their] generation, the megaproject ‘Russia’.”\footnote{227} Taking into consideration the emphasis that \textit{Nashi} places on the tasks of Russia’s modernization and competitiveness, it is fair to say that what \textit{Nashi} aspires to create is no less than a unique Russian brand: “We want to improve the lives of people in Russia so that people from other countries envy us, so that they aspire to live like we do. ‘To live like a Russian’ must become hip.”\footnote{228}

It is then ironic that, as if in anticipation of Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova’s comments that the foreign policy of the U.S. bears resemblance to a reality show in its purported overwhelming reliance on image-building tactics, rather than on facts, \textit{Nashi} decries the U.S. politics as “the endless American show”: “American politics, American
elections with the budget of 5 billion dollars, McCain’s rating, global economic crisis – these are all American ‘entertainment’ paid with the lives of thousands of people.”

Pointing to “[the atomic bombing in] Hiroshima, [U.S. involvement in military conflicts in Iraq,] South Ossetia, ‘color revolutions’ in former Soviet Union republics, [the breakup of] Yugoslavia, the Twin Towers collapse,” the youth group urges Russians to “express their civic position regarding this issue,” that is, to “say ‘no’ to the [senseless, inhumane] American show.”

Thus, having become a major Kremlin-sponsored PR project, Nashi, as the hyster, speaks the language that it hears the Other speak in order to beat the latter in its own game.

As the above discussion of Nashi’s national narrative shows, Nashi employs Burkean tragedy and the tragic fantasy-frames of epic, elegy, satire, burlesque, and the grotesque. This and the fact that Nashi’s rhetoric contains no trace of the Lacanian-Burkean tragicomic attitude characterize Nashi’s national fantasy as politically dangerous and morally suspect. Russia is depicted as being surrounded by enemies and always in danger. Nevertheless the Russians are capable of escaping the impending universal disaster by sacrificing their enemies and embracing their “true” Russian self.

In addition to arguing that the imaginary dimension of Nashi’s psycho-rhetorical narrative presents a politically dangerous and morally suspect way to renegotiate national identity construction, my reading of the psycho-rhetorical narrative of Nashi also demonstrates how the group’s narrative unfolds in the Symbolic. From its “democratic anti-fascist” position Nashi attempts to reshape the dominant symbolic field organized by the nodal point of liberal democracy, to rearticulate its meaning. More specifically, by drawing parallels between Russia’s past and present enemies - Nazi Germany and Western countries as their modern “sympathizers,”

---

229 “Tambov” n.pag.; “Zarechny” n.pag.
230 “Tambov” n.pag.; “Zarechny” n.pag.
Nashi “validates” tragic images of the national self and secures a symbolic position of the only “true” defender of anti-fascist memory and democratic present time. This move allows Nashi to present itself and the Kremlin as authentic democrats and thus determine, as a master signifier would, the whole symbolic field of liberal democracy.

5.2 The Comic National Fantasy of Independent Anti-Fascists (Antifa) as the Agent of the Analyst’s Discourse

The painful memory of the Soviet Union’s fight with fascism during World War II has posed an obstacle and created an opportunity for Russian neo-fascists, such as the nationalist movement Russkie, the Slavic Union, the Movement against Illegal Immigration, the Russian Imperial Movement, and state-sponsored “anti-fascists,” such as Nashi, in their attempts to renegotiate the meaning of Russianness. Terribly injured in the battle with Nazi Germany, the Russians have developed an almost automatic adverse reaction to anything or anybody deemed “fascist.” As a result, Russian neo-fascists scramble to dissociate themselves from the fascism of Nazi Germany by declaring the latter to be a perversion of the “true” fascist ideology. Asserting themselves as proponents of freedom of speech and defenders of the rights of the Russian people, or, in other words, as “fair,” “democratic” fascists narrate their fantasy of the national self and the national other through discourses of tragic mourning.

More precisely, Russian neo-fascists attempt to resolve the apparent grotesque disparity between their own fascist actions and “democratic” intentions by resorting to the rhetoric of apocalyptic elegy, paranoid tragedy and prophetic epic: the narrative of the nation on a special mission, the success of which is undeservingly threatened by actual “fascists,” who therefore
must be symbolically or physically destroyed. Unlike Russian neo-fascists, who had to reconcile their fascist attitudes with popular memories of the Great Patriotic War, the pervasive revulsion of the Russians against the fascism of Nazi Germany has made it easy for Nashi to push its supposedly “anti-fascist” agenda. Self-proclaimed “anti-fascists,” however, did not venture to counteract neo-fascist behavior (e.g., Nashi’s anti-fascist actions have been limited to mostly inconsequential, activities, such as painting pink hearts and smilies over fascist graffiti). Instead, Nashi’s “anti-fascist” vision of the Russian nation stands in uneasy proximity to the neo-fascist image of the national self and the national other. Admittedly, Nashi exhibits slightly less tragic behavior than neo-fascists. Yet it too, in order to realize its political agenda, exploits, albeit in more subtle ways, the xenophobic and racist mood prevalent among many Russians today.

Reminiscent of the neo-fascist national narrative, Nashi’s fantasy is the tragedy of the nation surrounded by numerous enemies who treat it unfairly and thus must be dealt with if Russia is to return to its “predestined” course. Although for neo-fascists the major evil comes from people of non-Russian ethnicity, and for Nashi the primary threat emanates from the West, the national fantasies of neo-fascists and state-sponsored “anti-fascists” have much more in common than not. The list of enemies, which both groups portray as “fake” democrats and “true” fascists, significantly overlap. More important, the ways in which neo-fascists and pro-Putin “anti-fascists” negotiate Russian national identity are far from the Lacanian-Burkean tragicomic attitude, which, if achieved, would allow the national rhetoric of both groups to be more politically sound and more morally acceptable.

Amid all of this tragic discourse, however, exists a third force: a constellation of independent anti-fascist groups known as Antifa. This third force joins Russian neo-fascists and state-sponsored “anti-fascists” to contest what it means to be Russian. Antifa, as a network of
autonomous anti-fascist affinity-groups, resists “the politics of neo-Nazi political parties, but also...individual racism,... totalitarianism, xenophobia, religious, national and gender discrimination.” Besides, the most popular Antifa’s slogans include “Will to freedom is stronger than prison! Say ‘No’ to political repressions,” “Antifascism is not a crime! Stop the persecution of...antifascists,” “[Antifascist] Nikita Kalinin is murdered by neo-Nazis,” “Say ‘No’ to political assassinations!”, “Unite in the fight against ethnic nationalism and capitalism” and, finally, “Russia is for everybody, except fascists!” as a response to a favorite slogan of neo-fascists “Russia is for ethnic Russians.” While Antifa members adhere to a diverse palette of political views, such as “liberalism, Marxism, anarchism and other derivative ideologies,” they are say united in their “opposition to reactionary, ultra-right and center-right ideologies, such as national socialism, fascism, conservatism, neo-liberalism and others.”

Just like the anti-fascist movement in Western Europe, which arose in the 1920s in response to budding fascism and never culminated in the creation of a single party, but instead has been represented by a number of brief collaborations among pronouncedly left-wing groups (which have quite distinct views on a fascist threat), antifascism in Russia has not been much more than “a monumental ambiguity” either. Speaking in more precise terms, Antifa in modern Russia functions as Laclau’s empty signifier, that is, as a term that is able to enclose (and, in effect, temporarily efface) a variety of particular meanings, such as anarchism, communism, liberalism and so on, by way of setting them against the common exclusionary limit

---

231 “Anti-Fascist Manifesto,” n. pag. For more see Antifa’s websites at <http://www.antifa.fm> and <http://ru-antifa.livejournal.com>. The discussion of the psychical-rhetorical narrative of the nation, as it is has been renegotiated by Antifa, relies on the close textual reading of position articles and interviews with independent Russian anti-fascists published mainly on the official information-analytic portal of Antifa (www.antifa.fm) and in part on the official website of Autonomous Action (www.avtonom.org), a revolutionary anarchist movement that shares Antifa’s sentiments on fascism and the role of the state. Antifa’s website can be better understood as a collection of articles written specifically for the website and reprinted from other sources.  

232 “Antifascists Came Out to Rally in Defense of Their Comrades” n. pag.  

233 “Breaking Stereotypes” n. pag.  

234 Ceplair 3. Also see Garcia.
of fascism. In other words, the ideological differences that set groups with liberal and diversely leftist views apart from each other do not matter much in the face of a fascist threat, which unites the former in equivalent resentment toward the latter.

Such unity, however, is always precarious, since “the being or [identity] which is represented through the empty signifiers is not a being which has not been actually realized, but one which is constitutively unreachable...[as] the result...of the unstable compromise between equivalence and difference.” To place Laclau’s words in the context of the present discussion of antifascism, it is enough to state that the idea of resistance to fascism or the identity of the antifascist can never be definitely connected to one, supposedly true meaning or essence. As a result, on a more practical, immediate level, it is easy to notice that, similar to the antifascist movement in Western Europe, Russian independent antifascism is burdened with the problem of ideological discord: “What at first seemed a catch basin large enough to contain both the Marxist Left and those dedicated to defending democratic values and civil liberties became a crowded vessel that broke and sank under the pressure of the hidden agendas of its inhabitants.”

Such ideological disarray becomes exceptionally palpable during an attempt to identify Antifa’s specific adversaries. While Antifa’s Manifesto emphasizes the danger of any kind of oppression and discrimination, that are intrinsic elements of fascist ideology, a close reading of the narrative of independent anti-fascists reveals that not all of them share the same enemies.

This is the case with, for instance, anarchist skinheads, who make up Russia’s Red and Anarchist

---

235 Laclau defines the empty signifier as “a signifier without a signified” and “a signifier of the pure cancellation of all difference,” because “vis-à-vis the excluded element, all other differences are equivalent to each other – equivalent in their common rejection of the excluded identity.” All social identity, as Laclau insists, condenses around such empty signifiers, which defines the field of the social and the political: “The social is nothing but the locus of this irreducible tension [between differences and equivalences]...[A]ll social (that is, discursive) identity is constituted at the meeting point of difference and equivalence – just as linguistic identities are the seat of both syntagmatic relations of combination and paradigmatic relations of substitution.” Laclau, “Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?” 36, 38. Laclau, On Populist Reason 70, 80.


237 Ceplair 3.
Skinheads (RASH) and Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice (SHARP) groups, the minority of whom enthusiastically endorse Stalin’s role in the USSR’s victory over fascism and in the promotion of the arguably liberatory potential of socialism, whereas others, as I will show below, press for a far greater reflection on the Soviet past.  

It is even more peculiar, however, that on the very same social media public page (which along with other antifascists articles, website pages and booklets amounts to a larger, albeit quite dissonant, narrative), the minority of antifascists call to cherish the political legacy of the USSR, claiming that “[e]thnic Russians have always respected the principles of collectivism, justice, equality and freedom” and that the Soviet people, who comprised a multicultural and multiethnic nation, were truly tolerant towards each other’s differences, and simultaneously parade their anti-Semitic, homophobic, anti-Muslim and racist views. In addition, some independent antifascists extend support to Putin’s military interposition in Ukraine, which began in the spring of 2014 with the armed conflict between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian government in Eastern Ukraine and Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea. It is unsurprising then that these views are complemented with a deep distrust of the West and pro-Western former Soviet republics, just as with an open disregard of the “liberal law-bound system.”

The majority of independent anti-fascists, however, aims to counteract the politics of Putin’s authoritarian regime, “which exerts greater control over people’s lives, destroys the environment and exacerbates the social and economic disparity” between the rich and the poor. Unlike Nashi or neo-fascists, who are officially or unofficially tied to the Kremlin, Antifa claims to be a loosely structured movement that “does not cooperate with any state bodies,

\[238\] See the pages “Merry Checkist” and “Ethnic Russians against Fascism.”
\[239\] “Ethnic Russians against Fascism” n.pag.
\[240\] “A Five-Year Fight” n.pag.
\[241\] “Anti-Fascist Manifesto” n. pag.
political parties or repressive units,” and is not sponsored by any Russian or foreign organization.242

While the Nashi movement is supported by Putin, and neo-fascists are mostly tolerated by the state, independent radical anti-fascists are often prosecuted and denied a chance to voice their discontent. Apparently, Antifa has become a common nuisance in Russia, both in the eyes of the Russian public and the state. For instance, many Russians see both neo-fascists and true anti-fascists as equally dangerous street hooligans who fisticuff with each other for “some obscure ideas,” and state officials blame the radical and truly anti-fascist youth for provoking ethnic disturbances.243 Antifa stands at an immense distance from their “anti-fascist” counterparts in Nashi and their neo-fascist opponents, both in how they are treated by the state and how they envision the national self and the national other. Before I turn to the analysis of the latter, I must first offer a brief introduction to events that help to explain the way independent radical anti-fascists claim their version of “Russianness.”

As mentioned earlier, National Unity Day on November 4 has become a momentous occasion in the process of national identity renegotiation in modern Russia. Russian neo-fascists did not hesitate to seize this opportunity to present their extreme ethnic nationalist ideas to the wider Russian public. Envious of the success of the scandalous Russian Marches (Right Marches), Nashi has made several attempts to hijack the brand of the Russian March. Nashi’s endeavors to “redeem” the idea of the annual nationalist demonstrations, however, ended with its members chanting the far-right slogan “Russia is for Russians.” Cognizant of the need for true anti-fascist resistance long before the first Russian Marches of 2005, independent anti-fascists also resorted to various measures, ranging from organizing educational and cultural events and

242 “Anti-Fascist Manifesto” n. pag.
243 “Activists Discussed” n. pag.
holding peaceful rallies, to shooting paint bombs into marching neo-fascists, drawing anti-fascist graffiti, hanging anti-fascist and anti-government banners, hacking neo-fascist websites and scuffling with neo-fascists.

Besides Antifa’s responses to the Russian Marches, independent anti-fascists frequently participate in memorial events to honor and remember true anti-fascists murdered by neo-fascists. Among the most visible events have been the March Against Hatred, an annual rally held around October 31 in memory of Nikolai Girenko (a murdered ethnologist and human rights activist who served as an expert witness in trials against neo-fascists), the action of January 19 in memory of Stanislav Markelov (another murdered human rights lawyer who worked on numerous high-profile cases involving state authorities, military officials and neo-fascists) and Anastasia Baburova (a murdered journalist whose work often covered activities of Russian neo-fascist groups), and rallies in memory of other murdered anti-fascist activists, such as Timur Kacharava, Ivan Khutorskoi (aka Vanya Kostolom) and Fedor Filatov.

Sadly, for the last decade assaults on Antifa activists have become the norm: for true anti-fascists “any event is like a military action,” “a real war of extermination - with explosives, snipers, car chases etc.”

244 Antifa’s own violent behavior is not, however, solely a defensive reaction to neo-fascist aggression. Some independent radical anti-fascists, known as “militant Antifa,” see violence against neo-fascists as the main means by which to “educate” the latter. Among the most questionable actions of the militant Antifa group have been assaults on peaceful neo-fascist rallies and concerts, as well as the attacks on the office of the pro-Kremlin youth organization Young Russia and the office of the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda. In November 2009, militant anti-fascists reportedly entered the Young Russia office, ignited flares and assaulted Young Russia activists as a retaliation against Young Russia’s leader, State Duma

244 “Everybody Has a Right for His Fifteen Minutes of Fame,” n. pag.
deputy Maksim Mischenko, who maintains close ties with the ultra-right organization Russian Image (one of the founders of Russian Image, Nikita Tikhonov, together with his wife Evgeniya Khasis, was found guilty in the double murder of Markelov and Baburova). A month later, they crashed into the Komsomolskaya Pravda office with smoke flares and fire crackers to protest against its journalist Dmitrii Steshin, a self-acknowledged ethnic nationalist, a friend of Tikhonov and Khasis, and a defense witness in the Tikhonov and Khasis’s trial.

The aggressive behavior of anti-fascists does not seem to separate militant Antifa groups either from Nashi or, as some independent anti-fascists acknowledge, violent neo-fascists: “today it is difficult to distinguish between anti-fascists and neo-Nazis: slang, clothes style, hobbies, unreasonable violence are totally identical. All these are a sign of a complete degeneration of the anti-fascist movement.”\textsuperscript{245} Besides, the actions of militant anti-fascists, admittedly criticized within the Antifa circle, seem to have sometimes escalated the war between neo-fascists and anti-fascists and provoked further acts of neo-Nazi terrorism. Recently, however, street fights have been reported less frequently. The reason, as Galina Kozhevnikova from the SOVA Center explains, is that, disillusioned with the inefficiency of the anti-fascist action on the part of the state and consequently seeing itself as a lonely force in the partisan street fight with Russian neo-fascists, Antifa is simply reluctant to disclose its combat losses.\textsuperscript{246} The situation is exacerbated by Antifa’s ideological distrust of the government, on the one hand, and the heightened, albeit mostly undue, attention of law-enforcement agencies to independent radical anti-fascists, on the other. Under these circumstances, Antifa opposes itself to neo-fascists and the state, which, according to independent radical anti-fascists, is an ally of the former.

\textsuperscript{245} “The Road to Nowhere,” n. pag.
\textsuperscript{246} “Galina Kozhevnikova. Radical Nationalism in Russia and Countermeasures in 2008,” n. pag.
Indeed, Antifa has good reasons to be skeptical of anti-fascist measures taken by law enforcement and state authorities. Often the police refrain from protecting the audience of true anti-fascist music events against neo-fascists. Even more frequently law enforcement officers refuse to file hate crime charges against neo-fascists. The discriminatory treatment of the independent anti-fascist movement by the state is also revealed when true anti-fascists seek permission for public gatherings. More often than not, independent anti-fascists are denied opportunities to hold rallies, and when unsanctioned mass meetings do happen the police usually crack down on them promptly and severely. In contrast, for instance, despite the aggressive behavior of participants in the Manezh Square rally toward non-Slavic passersby, the police made almost no arrests to avoid “provoking more serious incidents” (sixty-five detainees were subsequently released, while as many as forty people were injured in the racist attacks on December 11, 2010). Moreover, the captain of the Moscow Special Purpose Mobile Unit (OMON) and the chief of the Central Internal Affairs Directorate came to the square to persuade protesters to disperse by promising to find those guilty of soccer fan Sviridov’s murder (as I briefly mentioned in Chapter Three, he was allegedly killed by people from the Caucasus). The government’s half-hearted efforts in dealing with the violent racist mob are difficult to comprehend, especially compared to the prompt and violent police responses to peaceful public actions organized by political oppositional groups (known as Dissenters’ Marches and Strategy-31) and independent anti-fascists.

247 “Participants in the Rally on Manezh Square Started Attacking Police,” n. pag.
The prejudicial attitude of the state toward Antifa has also manifested itself in cases of wrongfully prosecuted anti-fascists, including Aleksei Olesinov (aka Shkobar), the “Khimki hostages” Alexei Gaskarov and Maxim Solopov, and Nizhny Novgorod anti-fascists Albert Hainutdinov, Artem Bystrov, Pavel Krivinosov, Dmitrii Kolesov and Oleg Himbaruk. Olesinov was arrested in 2008 for allegedly starting a brawl at the night club “Cult,” and after more than six months in jail he was found guilty of disorderly conduct and sentenced to one year in a penal colony. Many are certain that Olesinov’s case was fabricated, since neither the club administration nor guests pressed charges. According to the initial indictment, “[Olesinov] committed an act of disorderly conduct, which shows his obvious disrespect for society.” The prosecution also mentioned that “[Olesinov] is a leader of the informal youth movement Antifa, whose goal is … [the destabilization of] normal functions of society.” Olesinov’s defense lawyer Markelov, Antifa and human rights activists noted repeatedly that Olesinov was tried for being an anti-fascist and that his case was the most severely handled case of disorderly conduct in the history of Russian law. Several years later, Olesinov was again taken into custody in relation to a brawl with the security at Moscow’s night club “Air.” Just as the first time, the facts contradicted the charges, thus exposing the political nature of both legal actions.

Others judged for their anti-fascist views, Gaskarov and Solopov, were apprehended by law enforcement officers for allegedly instigating an attack on Khimki’s City Hall. Gaskarov and Solopov denied their involvement in the rally on July 29, 2010, when around 500 anti-fascists and anarchists with the slogans “Free the forest from fascist occupation 1941-2010” and “Defend the Russian forest!” surrounded the Khimki City Hall building, painted on the walls, broke down a door and smashed several windows in protest against the construction of a new highway.

---

250 See Volodarsky, “Gaskarov and Solopov,” n. pag.
251 “Human Rights in Russia,” n. pag.
through Khimki Forest. The anti-fascist action occurred several days after the Khimki forest defenders (who set up a protest camp in the forest) had been assaulted reportedly by a group of neo-fascist soccer fans. In an interview with Komsomolskaya Pravda, Aleksandr Semchenko, the director of the company in charge of cutting down the forest, acknowledged the company’s involvement in the crackdown on the Khimki forest defenders’ camp, but clarified that the camp attackers were not ultra-right soccer fans but security guards hired by Semchenko to provoke forest defenders.

The inaction of the police, who instead of protecting the protesters arrested them, and the lack of progress in the case of Mikhail Semchenko, a prominent defender of the Khimki forest and the editor of the Khimki Truth, who was severely beaten and as a result remained permanently disabled, as some anti-fascists insist, led to the disturbances at the Khimki City Hall. A month later the “Khimkgate” culminated in an oppositional mass rally-concert in Moscow, which gathered more than 3,000 people to protest the building of the highway. What began as an environmental action later transformed into an anti-government revolt with Khimki forest as a metaphor for the country’s suffering under Putin’s “repressive and lawless regime.”

While Gaskarov and Solopov had not been caught red-handed on the site of the Khimki City Hall pogrom, and in spite of the absence of compelling evidence, the anti-fascists were nevertheless arrested and questioned. The police failed to find the real organizers of the attack on the Khimki City hall and therefore, as Antifa explains, took the most publicly visible anti-fascists

---

253 See Suprycheva, n. pag.
It is worth pointing out that Gaskarov and Solopov were apprehended not by regular police officers but by officers of Center E - a unit to combat extremism, created in 2008 to replace the Bureau for Combating Organized Crime (UBOP). According to Center E officers, “youngsters went overboard, having directly challenged the authorities. A task was given to bring them down harshly, that is why nobody will be molly-coddling them.” Soon it became clear that new anti-extremist methods did not apply to Antifa exclusively: police officers also promised to deal with journalists -“extremist sympathizers” - who were allegedly aware of the upcoming Khimki City Hall rally but did not report it to the police.

The most recent operation carried out by Center E (often compared to the oprichnina, or the secret police of Ivan the Terrible) has been an arrest of anti-fascists in Nizhny Novgorod. Suspected of being members of Antifa-R.A.S.H (Red and Anarchist Skinheads), Hainutdinov, Bystrov, Krivinosov, Kolesov and Himbaruk were accused of promoting hatred toward neo-fascist skinheads, soccer fans and “well-to-do citizens,” and assaulting neo-fascists. The anti-fascists, however, by drawing attention to apparent inconsistencies in the case (for instance, the Antifa-R.A.S.H identification cards reputedly planted by police officers were misspelled and incorrectly stood for “Red anarchic skinheads”) claimed that the case was fabricated and they were political prisoners. Yet, numerous challenges to the improper questioning and search procedures which, just as in the Khimki case, resulted in emotional and psychical intimidation,
have been explained by law enforcement authorities as the excessive enthusiasm of a small
handful of police officers.260

Under the circumstances, when “Putin turned out to be the main [ethnic] nationalist, and
the new regime established a monopoly on [ethnic] nationalism,” independent anti-fascists set
themselves first and foremost against “the police state” and only then against neo-fascists.261 The
old slogan of the anti-fascist struggle, “fascists kill, the state covers,” however, does not seem to
reflect the new state of affairs. Unable to maintain its political urgency, the Russian neo-fascist
movement, according to Antifa, has lost its ideological identity: “extreme nationalists [have]
nothing more to add to the state rhetoric of...great power chauvinism and anti-Westernism.”262
As independent anti-fascists argue, fascism has become “an element of the Kremlin’s puppeteer
politics, needed for various provocations and show campaigns,” and neo-fascists have become
the Kremlin’s puppets.263

The alleged anti-establishment character of the ultra-right, according to Antifa, has
proved to be a myth. The ultimate goal of Russian neo-fascists, just like the official Russian
Orthodox Church for that matter, in Antifa’s view, has always been to become a part of the
state’s power: “they dream about... crowds of people who, overcome with hate and reverence,
blindly follow them.”264 Notwithstanding their professed hatred of Putin’s “Russophobe” regime
and contempt for the “apolitical” Russian liberal opposition, as Antifa points out, Russian neo-
fascists are ready to join forces with state authorities, as, for example, happened in the assault on
the Khimki environmental camp, or when they rallied alongside the liberal opposition to protest

260 See “Investigation without Mollycoddling,” n. pag.
261 “Russian Nationalism During Putin’s and Medvedev’s Presidencies,” n. pag.; “The War Is Over. It Is
Time to Take New Positions,” n. pag.
262 “Russian Nationalism During Putin’s and Medvedev’s Presidencies,” n. pag.
263 No Pasaran?!,” n. pag.
264 “19 January 2012. Anti-Fascist Demonstration in Memory of Markelov and Baburova in Moscow,” n.
pag.
Russia’s new anti-extremist legislation, which limits neo-fascists in their attempts to foment hatred among Russians and other ethnicities. As independent anti-fascists astutely conclude, support for “the [state] politics of fear, inequality, violence, hatred and exclusivity” has united neo-fascists and state-sponsored “anti-fascists.” Conversely, independent anti-fascists see their activity as the “the antithesis of all hierarchies, an antithesis of everything that Nazism and capitalism are, an antithesis of any commands.”

One may note that Antifa’s rhetoric of the national other, at first glance, does not seem to differ much from the paranoid tragedies of Russian neo-fascists and Nashi: hemmed in by its foes, independent anti-fascists counter the fascist threat with violence. For Antifa, this threat emanates from Putin’s “police state,” its loyal “regime dogs” (Center E and Nashi), state-favored neo-fascists, as well as “toothless,” hypocritical liberal politicians with their neo-liberal version of a democratic regime, while “true democracy” and freedom are the foundation of the anti-fascist worldview. Similarly, both the neo-fascist movement and the state-sponsored “anti-fascist” youth organization claim to safeguard “genuine democracy” and challenge “beastly fascism.” A more thorough reading of Antifa’s psycho-rhetorical narrative of the nation, however, offers a totally different insight.

As distinguished from the tragic national rhetoric of neo-fascists and pro-Kremlin “anti-fascists,” the national fantasy of independent anti-fascists appears to advance a Lacanian-Burkean tragicomic view of the national self and the national other. Independent anti-fascists do not rely, as neo-fascists and Nashi do, on the necessity of symbolically or physically killing the national enemy, who presumably threatens the national self. Instead Antifa activists promote the

---

265 “Democracy and Nazism Are Incompatible,” n. pag.
266 “Now It Is in Fashion,” n. pag.
ideals of racial, ethnic, religious, economic and political equality. Anti-fascists see their national others as those who must be forgiven and educated in how to responsibly construct a national identity that does not function at the expense of the national other.

*Antifa* sees the modern anti-fascist movement as a successor to the tradition of self-defense brigades formed at the beginning of the twentieth century in response to the extremist actions of the semi-fascist Black Hundred. While, warranted by frequent neo-fascists’ attacks on *Antifa* activists in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, brutal force has been a part of anti-fascist action, most Russian anti-fascists draw a line between anti-fascist struggle and the killing of political opponents: “our aim is not to annihilate people....If people suffer as a result of our direct action, it is...an accident. If one is ready to kill because of somebody’s uniform...he or she does not differ much from Nazis, who are eager to kill because of somebody’s skin color, eye shape or hair structure.”

As a loosely structured network of anti-fascist affinity-groups, driven by various left-wing ideologies, *Antifa* acknowledges the precarious status of physical force as a tool to fight fascism and emphasizes the exclusively defensive use of violence: “We started to fight only because they started to murder us.”

From time to time, as anti-fascists admit, certain groups, just as it happened at the Khimki City Hall, get absorbed by playing “the fascinating role of Rambo: corrupted bandits, Nazi raiders - what can be more impressive, more beautiful?” The romantic image of the street fight with neo-fascists, most anti-fascists lament, often overpowers “the constructive and politically grounded [principle of anti-fascist] actions,” thus turning *Antifa* into “a criminal subculture, members of which seek an adrenaline rush in the streets of our cities.” Admitting that

---

269 “They Consider Us Dangerous for Society,” n. pag.
270 “Everybody Has a Right for His Fifteen Minutes of Fame,” n. pag.
271 “The Road to Nowhere.”
“violence has more often overpowered reason,” anti-fascists warn their misguided fellow anti-fascists about the danger of slipping into a neo-fascist version of activism. Instead, when possible, anti-fascists advocate the power of an argument: “It is better to smack a fifteen-year old in his face; however, it is easier to persuade an adult, he will listen to you at least....I see that many people seriously believe that Russia is for Russians and that patriotism is cool. And I argue with them.” For anti-fascists, however, “it is impossible to rely on agitation, pamphlets and other similar methods” when dealing with neo-fascists who systematically resort to and promote violence.

Self-reflective about the erroneous blind fanaticism and radicalism of some Antifa groups, as a feature of a comic attitude to the national self, independent anti-fascists emphasize that those who enjoy fantasies of ethnic exclusivity are not absolutely evil, but mistaken fools, “poor things” who fall for the empty promises of “crypto-religious” fascist fantasies: “It is not migrants or ‘outlanders’ who threaten the mythical ‘native majority,’ but the ultra-right minority who threatens diverse populations living within a particular geographic area. The problem has nothing to do with the Russian question, but with corruption and a society that allows one to pressure, exploit and silence others notwithstanding their nationality and religion.” Fascism as a compensatory mechanism offers to resolve social tensions by finding the roots of those problems in “an easy, familiar, and, more importantly, vulnerable figure of the [national] enemy.” The lesson, as some anti-fascists see it, is precisely the one that we learn by adopting a Lacanian-Burkean tragicomic view of the nation: the national enemy is no more than a symbolic

272 “They Consider Us Dangerous for Society,” n. pag.
273 “They Consider Us Dangerous for Society,” n. pag.
274 “Activists Discussed the Contemporary Anti-Fascist Movement in Russia on Air with Radio Svoboda,” n. pag.
276 Volodarsky, Aleksandr. “Church, State, and Nazis,” n. pag.
embodiment of underlying social antagonisms. “Do not look for a black cat in a dark room, do not create your own enemy...think for yourself.”

By stressing how fascist ideology artificially creates an image of the enemy by covering over the real reasons for social disparities, Antifa urges Russians to recognize that fascism is lurking in themselves. The failure of the Soviet system brought about an ideological vacuum: “consumer values, on the one hand, monstrous poverty, on the other [led] the youth to answer the question ‘who is guilty?’ in the most primitive, brutish way: ‘intruders,’ those who are not from our pack, are guilty.” The state, as Antifa insists, is accountable for this “chaos in people’s heads,” since it left people indifferent and susceptible to “the ideology of hatred and terror:” “[the current regime] benefits from the cattle-like behavior of the people; the less they think, the better they vote....90% of the youth dream about a nice position in a state corporation, 10% about a nationalistic revolution.”

It may seem that Antifa places responsibility for the xenophobic and racist views of most people on the state and the leaders of neo-fascist groups, who dupe Russians into believing mythical stories about enemies of the Russian nation. While this in part is certainly true, independent anti-fascists also call on all Russians to accept their own role in promoting discriminatory values and practices. One must remember that “fascism exists among us. It hides in thoughts, feelings and ideas, which force us...to aspire for that which enslaves and exploits us....In the disguise of conservative values, fascism offers to magically exorcise the feelings of fear and anxiety which are natural emotions in a modern fickle world.” Having recognized that one’s nationality has nothing to do with social problems, Russians, according to Antifa, must

277 “Aleksey Etmanov,” n. pag.
278 “Andrey Loshak’s Interview with the 19 January Committee,” n. pag.
279 “Andrey Loshak’s Interview with the 19 January Committee,” n. pag.; “On Freedom of Speech for Fascists,” n. pag.
280 “How to Know Out Fascism,” n. pag.
perform a thorough inventory of their own fears and aspirations, their “inferiority complex and imperial ambitions.”

Antifa invites the Russians to revise the century-long dilemma of whether Russia’s proper place is in the West or in the East: “the desire to see [Russia] by all means among ‘developed European countries,’” as anti-fascists insist, proves to be rather detrimental. Without denying the necessity to maintain strong ties with Europe, anti-fascists underscore that the old imperial and then Soviet urge to “catch up with and surpass the West” brings out the worst in the Russians - the simultaneous feeling of inferiority to the economically developed West and superiority over arguably primitive and backward countries and peoples of the East. This tension between self-hatred and self-aggrandizement, in Antifa’s view, is bound to engender racism and other discriminatory attitudes: “Whereas harboring a feeling of social supremacy over ‘the ravshans and the djumshuts,’ locals understand the instability of this superiority. And inasmuch they fear to lose their jobs, they do not have any successful experience in collective action, their lack of faith in themselves prevents them from speaking out against their employers, and they channel anger against those who are even more oppressed and powerless.” “We are all Tajiks,” concludes anti-fascists, “in the sense that lawlessness and humiliation do not have a nationality. They are state tools used against each and every one of us.” For Antifa, Russian society will have fascist tendencies as long as people are divided into various - better or worse - categories.

Having destabilized an image of the national other as an evil enemy who needs to be destroyed, and fighting instead for equality among people of various ethnic backgrounds,

---

281 “Andrey Loshak’s Interview with the 19 January Committee,” n. pag.
282 “Aleksandr Panov,” n. pag.
283 The names of Ravshan and Djumshut - fictional characters portraying illegal labor immigrants from Tajikistan in the comic series Nasha Russia [“Our Russia”] - have already become common names in the Russian language describing slavelike and almost mentally challenged migrant workers. 41
284 “Tyranny and Humiliation as State as State Tools,” n. pag.
Antifa’s position, nevertheless, is not of passive tolerance but active outrage. The only adequate answer to all those who stand for discrimination, defend the presumed superiority of certain ethnicities over other nations, and consider violence to be a norm, is to “get rid of [neo-fascists] once and for all,” be that via a symbolic or physical purification: “violence is one of the methods, but not a primary one; naturally we must use brute force only against those who deserve it.”

This anti-fascist stance, however, does not equal the tragic fantasy-frame so eagerly adopted by Russian neo-fascists and Nashi, for whom the national other is always a menacing, abstract, mythical enemy. Antifa’s view is that of the comic agon, when the national other is perceived as a necessary adversary, who, however, when crossing a healthy distance between the self and the other, must be stopped.

Such an attitude places independent anti-fascists at the very threshold of Lacan’s tragedy of the national self and Burke’s attitude of the comic agon: they proceed, first, by articulating the way in which the national self fantasmatically constitutes itself at the expense of the national other and, second, by assuming responsibility for their national fantasies. Antifa urges everyone not to stop at the realization that the national other is anything but the evil enemy, but to carry on resisting fascism. The total passivity of modern Russian society is “[the] most dangerous thing: when you see a swastika, marching young fascists, think who let it happen. To be silent is to agree.”

The “notorious” liberal politics of multiculturalism and tolerance, in Antifa’s words, is not helpful either: “it merely shows us the world through pink glasses without giving answers to real questions.” Thus, for example, Russian liberal politicians manifest their supposed

---

tolerance by arguing that migrant workers benefit the country, since most Russians refuse any
dirty, low-paid jobs. Forms of western liberal tolerance that have spread over modern Russia are,
according to Antifa, the same as xenophobic nationalism and “cultural apartheid: “[this] politics
aims to prevent outsiders from assimilating into Western society by encouraging cultural
backwardness in the form of ‘national traditions’ and ‘uniqueness,’ thus condemning them to a
life as outcasts, unqualified workers....”

Moreover, as anti-fascists argue, the logic of neo-liberal democracy - when the will of the
majority and economic liberalism are sold as one package - is the logic of discrimination,
imperialism, militarism and eventually fascism: “while there is the state and capitalism, while
there is social inequality and alienation, fascism cannot be overcome.” Real democracy,
understood by anti-fascists as a left-anarchist project, is founded on the idea of freedom: “the
anti-fascist struggle is inseparable from the fight for real democracy, for the right to vote for all
those who are stripped of this right, for the right to participate in the political life of the country
for all those who now lack this opportunity.” Disagreeing with neo-liberal politics, for
example the politics of the neo-liberal reforms in the 1990s, which “did not differ much from the
politics of Nazi Germany,” Antifa’s position is based on the purportedly natural human desire to
be free, which is possible only when all others can enjoy freedom to the same extent. At the
same time independent anti-fascists, however, deny neo-fascists the right to voice their hatred:
“when fascists freely express their opinions, all others are silenced.”

288 “Boris Kagarlitsky,” n. pag.
289 “Activists Discussed.”
290 “19 January 2012. Anti-Fascist Demonstration in Memory of Markelov and Baburova in Moscow,” n. pag.
291 “Andrey Loshak’s Interview with the 19 January Committee,” n. pag.
Anti-fascism, *Antifa* members claim, is the normal reaction of reasonable citizens to hatred and discrimination: “today anti-fascism is a process of social hygiene....To be an anti-fascist is the norm, and not an extraordinary civil position.” Unlike state-sponsored “anti-fascists” who insist on an almost automatic revulsion of Russians toward fascism, independent anti-fascists emphasize that the memory of the Soviet fight with Nazi Germany, on the contrary, prevents many Russians from identifying manifestations of fascism in modern Russia: “How can we speak about the victory over fascism if we keep mum about Stalin’s ethnic nationalism and his collaboration with Franco? We did not overcome fascism, that is why it is still here....We must remember about not only those terrible years, when Hitler terrorized all of Europe, but also about the cruel and inhumane actions of the Soviet Union.” The Soviet legacy of the country’s fight with Nazi Germany, when the latter was positioned as “just another military enemy,” without emphasizing why one must really fight fascism as an ideology of hatred, ironically left contemporary Russians susceptible to fascism and hostile to any abstract, mythologized enemy there is.

As this reading of *Antifa*’s national fantasy demonstrates, similar to the narratives of Russian neo-fascists and *Nashi*, true Russian anti-fascists attempt to reshape the dominant symbolic field of liberal democracy. For *Antifa* the prevalent global regime is regulated primarily by neo-liberal, economic considerations, which is a stranger to the ideals of true anti-fascism. However, unlike Russian neo-fascists and their pseudo “anti-fascist” counterparts *Nashi*, independent anti-fascists do not advocate for destructive interests under the guise of authentic democracy. *Antifa* finds itself on the brink of Lacan’s tragedy. Having assumed responsibility for their, at times questionable, modes of enjoyment and embodying Burke’s attitude of the comic

---

293 “Activists Discussed the Contemporary Anti-Fascist Movement in Russia on Air with Radio Svoboda.”
295 “Activists Discussed” n.pag.
agon, they engage in perpetual struggle with those who prohibit others from enjoying their healthy national fantasies. Moreover, the very form of this loosely organized movement, which constantly demands negotiation of ideals and emphasizes the absence of ultimate closure, corresponds to the structure of the Analyst’s Discourse. As such, the idea of the national self negotiated by Antifa in a variety of distinct voices, if only for a brief moment, precipitates in distinct master signifiers.

5.3 Vladimir Putin’s Russian Idea as a Tragic Response to Actual and Perceived Fascism

So far I have discussed how the pro-Putin “anti-fascist” movement Nashi, neo-fascists and the anti-fascist movement Antifa negotiate the objet a qua essence of Russianness, which revolves around the usage of the word fascism. The three distinct psycho-rhetorical narratives are read symptomatically - on the level of the Imaginary, or conscious fantasies which the parties maintain about the national self and others. While the national visions of neo-fascists and Nashi are dominated, yet in a different fashion, by tragedy and tragically marked frames of epic, elegy, burlesque and the grotesque, Antifa assumes a predominantly comic position. As the analysis moves into the realm of the Symbolic, the reading of the competing psycho-rhetorical narratives helps to explain much more than how specific images of the ideal national self and others organize the consciousness of Nashi, neo-fascists and Antifa.

First, considering psycho-rhetorical narratives in terms of both the Imaginary and Symbolic provides an opportunity to evaluate specific national fantasies as more or less politically and ethically dangerous or, on the contrary, sophisticated. Moreover, an emphasis on the Symbolic allows exploring the question of why each of the parties adopts certain fantasy-
frames. By locating themselves in relation to the history, practice and ideology of fascism (with the help of various tragic and/or comic means), Nashi, neo-fascists and Antifa attempt to secure their national selves as acceptable or even desirable within the dominant symbolic order of liberal democracy. By intervening in the overarching network of signifiers they also aim at rearticulating that network. As I have shown, the state-sponsored pseudo “anti-fascists” - Nashi - position themselves (as well as Putin who backs them up) as the only “true” anti-fascist and thus democratic force. Anyone who threatens their ideal national self, be that the regime's political opposition or unfriendly foreign governments, is deemed to be fascist.

Nashi’s “authentic” democratic ideal is the epitome of repression for Antifa. For the latter, Putin's regime, together with the youth activists it relies on, and together with the Russian neo-fascist groups that are largely a product of Putin's ethnically discriminatory politics, is what is wrong with Russia. Real democracy, according to anti-fascists, can be built on the left-anarchist ideal of freedom, which contrary to neo-liberal politics can guarantee equality and fairness for all. Compared to Nashi and Antifa, Russian neo-fascists have a hard time disassociating themselves from the historic burden of fascism. That is why Russian neo-fascists more often describe themselves as ethnic nationalists rather than fascists. In a rather peculiar manner, neo-fascists contrast their version of “good” fascism with the dominant democratic system, which, in their opinion, is nothing other than fascism in its worst sense. In other words, Russian ethnic nationalists endorse “democratic” fascism - an inborn craving of the Russians for the fair and good - and contest the real “fascism” of Putin's regime in particular and the Western world in general.

As it follows from the analysis of the psycho-rhetorical narratives of Nashi, neo-fascists and Antifa, the three parties see each other as threats (which, however, they propose to deal with
in distinct ways). In this section, I am looking at another, yet far more important, political force in the process of Russian national identity renegotiation: the Russian state. The psycho-rhetorical narrative of the increasingly authoritarian state can be read by paying attention to the rhetoric of Putin. For the purposes of the present study, I perform an analysis of Putin's psycho-rhetorical narrative in the context of his reactions to the actions of Nashi, neo-fascists and Antifa. As I will show, Putin's psycho-rhetorical narrative does not diverge much from the one promoted by the “Putin Youth.”

As the Kremlin's brainchild, the “democratic anti-fascist” movement Nashi from the beginning enjoyed Putin's keen support. “I am absolutely certain that...you can help...our society, the state in solving really important and complicated problems,” insisted Putin, who frequently visited Nashi's summer camp at Lake Seliger.296 In the controversy surrounding the Bronze Soldier monument in 2007, Putin gave warm encouragement to the “anti-fascists,” who voiced old grievances of the Russians against the purportedly ungrateful Estonians. As I have already discussed, for the Russians the monument symbolized not only the victory of the Soviet Union over the Nazis, but also the status of the USSR as an “elder brother” protecting the weak. Coupled with the alleged state discrimination of ethnic Russians living in the Baltic country, the bill calling for the moving of the monument and subsequent actions of the Estonian government was accounted for as the utmost disrespect to Russia, the “savior.”297 For Estonia, though, the bill on demolition of banned constructions afforded a favorable opportunity to get back at Russia for the years of Soviet rule following the Second World War, perceived as occupation by most Estonians today. Prime Minister of Estonia Andrus Ansip stated that “the relocation of the

monument was the only opportunity to preserve the dignity of the Republic of Estonia, and in the long run - the Estonian state.”

Compared to *Nashi*, who, having accused Estonia of “state fascism,” saw its national other as an inhumane, tragic enemy, Putin's characterization of these, as well as many other events was not as transparent. Estonia's legislative action, according to the Russian President, was “an absolutely short-sighted” step, “a continuation of [Estonia's] erroneous politics, related to its attempts to revise the past,” a “very bad, very harmful” decision, and “a sign of [the country’s] political immaturity.” One may argue that, having pointed out an error in Estonia's political behavior, Putin approached the scandal from a position of Burkean comedy. Yet Putin's acknowledgement of Estonia's mistake is far from the attitude of “humane enlightenment,” which feeds on true humility and leads to an inventory of personal limits.

In the eyes of Putin, Estonia's political error was not something inevitable and thus worthy of forgiveness, but a form of “unscrupulous political gambling,” a “purposeful” attempt to “get attention,” and an attempt “to exacerbate the relationship with Russia” in order to “earn some kind of economic or political benefits.” Those benefits are supposedly connected with the selfish attempts of Estonian politicians to gain points in a pre-election season and to advance their positions among the country's more powerful allies. Indeed, Estonia's decision to relocate the monument was supported by the U.S. and some European countries. Nevertheless, Putin's rhetoric and the measures implemented by the Russian government to “cool the eagerness of Estonian authorities” clearly illustrate that Estonia is not treated as an equal, contrary to a

---

298 “Hitler in Estonia,” n. pag.
299 “Estonia's State Fascism,” n. pag.
302 Rank, n. pag.
principle at the heart of the attitude of “humane enlightenment.” Putin looks down at Estonia as a politically, strategically and economically weaker national other, which, due to its immaturity, is prone to make mistakes and, as a result of its insecurity, is in need of help from more established political players. Like a parent who warns a mischievous child of impending punishment, Putin cautions Estonian authorities and Estonian citizens on Russia's necessary reaction to defend its interests. Such a paternalistic disposition, coupled with a promise of retaliation, do not blend in well with the ideal of comic humility. Moreover, Putin refers to Estonia's decision to relocate the monument, as well as other attempts to “mock the memory of those who liberated Europe from fascists” - and glorify Estonia's collaboration with the Nazis during the Second World War - as “an unprecedented act of state vandalism and disregard for universal moral norms,” and a form of “ultranationalist” politics. So do these images of Estonia as a sneaky political weasel and an immoral ultranationalist state warrant defining Putin's attitude towards Estonia as tragic? Intuitively, one may suppose that both images of the national other are equally tragic. Yet, for Putin, the difference between them is a matter of degree: the image of the political gambler turns out to be not as diabolic as the image of the ethnic hater.

While Nashi is adamant about the ultimately tragic, “fascist” nature of the Estonian state, Putin is somewhat wary in his choice of words. At times he calls Estonia ultranationalist and evil, yet he refrains from explicitly labeling the Baltic state “fascist.” Among possible reasons behind this nuance are diplomatic subtlety and political strategy. First, as the head of the state, Putin has to be cautious about how he voices his opinions. As for the “Putin Youth,” the Russian President acknowledges that “young people...think radically regarding almost any question [and] want the maximum result for themselves and for their country. I think it is a positive feature.

303 “MFA.” n. pag.; Burke, Attitudes toward History, 41.
One must aim at colossal victories.” Nashi then receive a carte blanche in the choice of methods needed to deal with the Kremlin's perceived enemies. One of the most tragic examples is the 2010 installation “You are not welcome here,” when Stal, Nashi’s radical wing, “impaled” the photos of Russia's “enemies” in hats with swastikas.

If for many years the Russian President had been “very pleased...to see the enthusiastic happy faces [and] eyes of young people, who are looking for themselves and find themselves” among like-minded fellows in the “democratic anti-fascist” movement, by 2012 the activity of Nashi reduced significantly amid rumors about the dissolution or transformation of the organization into independent projects. What prompted the Kremlin to give up on its loyal “guard” remains uncertain. The Kremlin's decision to bring the movement to a halt or reorganize it, some argue, is connected with Nashi's irrelevance, which increased as the threat of an “Orange” revolution in Russia subsided. Others insist that the reason for Nashi's disintegration is the movement leader Yakemenko, who allegedly fell out of favor with the Kremlin. However, the most convincing explanation is that the emails among Nashi's leader and activists leaked by the Russian branch of the Anonymous hacker movement badly dented the already not so perfect reputation of Russian “anti-fascists.” Moreover, Nashi's hostile style and the “primitivism of the...content” offered by the group did not match the Kremlin's ambiguous rhetoric, which alienated many Russian citizens. Nashi's crude tactics contributed to the deterioration of its image. The movement turned into exactly what Putin wanted to avoid (at least, in appearance, while not in substance) - “a quasi-Orthodox Komsomol” (a Soviet youth organization).

305 Transcript of the Press Conference,” 2006. n. pag.
307 “Meeting with the Participants,” n. pag.
308 See Arutunyan; Elder; Kuzmenkova and Vinokurova.
309 Kuzmenkova and Vinokurova.
310 “Meeting with the Participants,” n. pag.
The second reason behind Putin's reluctance to accuse Russia's presumed adversaries of fascism is likely strategic. For Putin fascism is predominantly a historical term, which is widely used in official rhetoric to refer to the ideology of the Nazi enemy of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. While in the heat of the moment some Russian state officials (though not Putin or Medvedev) may deem Russia's opponents fascist, this is not a “weapon” Putin relies on in his political fights. For example, when asked why Russian state officials do not hesitate to throw around the accusation of fascism with respect to, in particular, Estonia, Georgia, and the U.S., Putin clearly attempts to shrug off the uncomfortable question: “What concerns mutual insults and rebukes, they result from...the failure to communicate. I would rather not focus attention on this...”\(^{311}\) Compared with anti-extremist and anti-terrorist discourse, the political potential of the anti-fascist rhetoric, Putin suggests, is minimal.

Besides, since the focus of Putin’s politics is largely on Russia’s economic and technological modernization, which requires a significant degree of integration into a global, more diverse community and therefore presupposes cooperation with the West, to vocally accuse Western countries and former Allies of fascism does not seem to be tactically beneficial. Instead, by pushing for the need for partnership against the purportedly common threat of international terrorism, Putin announces that Russia must be considered as an important player in the international arena in general and the technological and economic spheres in particular.

Therefore, to explain why Putin banks on the nodal point of “terrorism” rather than “fascism” is key. To complete this task I continue reading Putin's vision of the national self and others as constructed and functions in the Imaginary and Symbolic, specifically in the context of Putin's reactions to the actions of neo-fascists, Nashi, and Antifa.

While Putin insists that “fascism was defeated in 1945,” he also admits that:

\(^{311}\) “Press Conference Following the Meeting,” n. pag.
the roots [of fascism]...have not been fully exterminated. Poison sprouts up in various corners of the planet....There are still those who seek new Führers. Those who bet on the misfortunes of others....Who are ready to overstep the boundaries of morality and human decency, and who show full disregard for...human life in order to reach their goals.\(^{312}\)

Thus Putin does not deny that neo-fascist ideas float around in contemporary society, both in Russian society and abroad. He stresses that all those who “think they act in the best interest of the ethnic Russians, [but instead] do colossal damage to the Russian nation” are simply “dumb” and “loony” “morons.”\(^{313}\) In addition to the home-grown “fanatics,” Putin suggests, “Russophobes” abroad who disseminate ideas of “hatred [and] racial superiority” and propose to rewrite the anti-fascist history and the role of the Soviet Union in the Second World War are immoral:

> It is sad what happens in other countries, when they glorify Nazi criminals. Yes, of course, nobody idealizes the Soviet Union in the post-war period. But by no means can one consider executioners to be victims. Those who bracket the Red Army with fascist invaders commit a moral crime.\(^{314}\)

Such characterizations of neo-fascist impulses leads to the tragic burlesque rather than purely tragic rejection of national others.

Putin regards the tragic burlesque of authentic hatred to be far less problematic than the pure tragedy of calculated provocation. By situating true neo-fascist others within the tragic burlesque, rather than the fantasy-frame of tragedy, Putin downplays the invasive power of “the

\(^{312}\) “Address on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary,” n. pag.
'bacillus' of [extreme] ethnic nationalism” (and, as I will show further, he almost denies the existence of Russia's ethnic nationalist, neo-fascist threat). 315 Those who subscribe to hateful messages and incite discriminatory actions, as Putin emphasizes, are “trivial mercenaries and bandits,” “agitators...who want to cash in on some problems, who want to be perceived as radical and gain something.” 316 Radicals who honestly believe in their cause “are in fact used [by terrorists] as a means to destabilize Russia.” 317 Thus Putin clearly differentiates between sincere believers, who in Putin's psycho-rhetorical narrative are situated within the tragic burlesque, and cynical sponsors of terrorism, who are truly tragic national others. Neither gullible believers nor sneaky cynics, according to Putin, can escape retribution appropriate to their crimes. Be it either the tragic burlesque of immoral insanity or the pure tragedy of inhumane, diabolic political manipulation, Putin is adamant about the need for Russia “to get the truth across to people,” “to bring those who commit such crimes to their senses.” 318 As for the burlesque national other, Putin repeatedly insists that “the [Russian] judicial system, law-enforcement agencies...must react adequately and promptly.” 319 Meanwhile, for the purely tragic national enemy, “the defeat of fascism must become a lesson and warning about the inevitability of revenge.” 320 Reading closely Putin's fantasy-frames of the truly tragic and tragically burlesque national others, it is possible to conclude that while the latter must be disciplined, it is portrayed as less dangerous and less responsible for its deeds.

Putin sees fascism as a calamity of the past, while terrorism is “a global challenge” of the present: “today we must remember not only the past, but also recognize the menace

318 “Dmitry Medvedev’s Interview with the Izvestia,” n. pag.; “Conversation with Vladimir Putin,” n. pag.
320 “Address at the Military Parade,” n. pag.
It is not less insidious, not less deadly...and not less ruthless” than fascism. But “fascism and terrorism are of the same nature: they both deny the value of human life, favor violence and violate any rights and freedoms.” Putin insists that the country's anti-fascist past - the memory of “the colossal sacrifice offered by the Soviet people” and “the military experience” of fighting with fascism - prompts Russia to be at the vanguard of the modern anti-terrorist war: “we cannot remain indifferent and silent when we...face instances of extremism, hatred, and racial superiority. It offends both our historical memory and conscience.” “[J]ust as we defeated fascism, together we will defeat terrorism,” adds Putin.

As decades ago “our people had no choice...[they]...could die or become slaves,” so now must the Russians come together against the “[challenge] of the new millennium.”

The problem of terrorism as a progeny of fascism, according to Putin, is “extremely relevant” to Russia in particular and the world in general. Like the “fascists [who] invaded the Soviet Union [and]... attempted to sow ethnic and religious discord among our peoples,” terrorists today “commit crimes, so to say, to undermine the territorial integrity of [Russia]” and, by extension, to compromise the very national idea. In concert with Russian neo-fascists and Nashi who consider the strength and authority of Russia to be the core of Russianness, Putin explains that “[i]n the 1990s Russia wanted to be friendly with the whole world. At that time we lost our identity. We were weak. Today we are much stronger, and many do not like that, so they

321 “Speech at the Ceremonial Performance,” n. pag.
322 “Address at the State Ceremony,” n. pag.
323 “To the Participants and Guests of the Ninth Russian People's Council,” n. pag.
324 “Dmitry Medvedev's Interview with the Izvestia,” n. pag.; “Speech at the Ceremonial Performance,” n. pag.
325 “Address at the Foundation Stone Ceremony,” n. pag.
326 “Dmitry Medvedev's Interview with the Izvestia,” n. pag.; “Joint Statement,” n. pag.
327 “Transcript of Direct Line,” n. pag.
328 “Awarding the Title,” n. pag.; “Meeting with Young Members of Parliament,” n. pag.
start knocking on our doors and try to weaken us and our country.” As Putin laments, terrorists and their sponsors are attempting to destroy Russia by all means possible: “[Terrorists] took advantage of the issues triggered by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and problems in Chechnya.... Obviously we must fight [terrorism] if we want to avoid the collapse of our state....It will be the Yugoslavization of Russia at its worst.”

A strong and powerful Russia, in other words, the country that enjoys itself fully, according to Putin, is a deterrent for those who bid to become a world authority: “[A] lesson from history is that a reason to unleash a war has always been an aspiration for global domination.” The terrorist threat, as it transpires from the analysis of Putin's psycho-rhetorical narrative, “comes from abroad,” takes advantage of unsuspecting, insane or simply stupid, ethnic Russian “hooligans,” militant Chechens or radical political opposition, targeting the most painful elements of Russian statehood: Russia's imperial heritage and autocratic tradition, exemplified in the relationship between the ethnic Russians and ethnic minorities and the relationship between the autocrat and political opposition respectively.

Unlike Nashi activists who unequivocally characterize the U.S. and its allies as fascists, for Putin such a move would be problematic and more importantly unproductive. On the one hand, Putin cautiously implies that the actions of the U.S. are nothing short of terrorism. Under the disguise of democracy, “the U.S. does not seek for friends, they need vassals,” it dreams of “a role as the world gendarme.” Just as “the Soviet Union tried to dictate its own will on its so-called quasi-allies,” so has the U.S. taken the truly dangerous position of “those are not with us

329 “Meetings with the Representatives of Various Communities,” n. pag.
330 “Transcript of Direct Line,” n. pag.
331 “Statement by the Press Service,” n. pag.
are against us.”

The U.S. “[wants] to move Russia aside, so the latter does not prevent [the former] from realizing its plans of world domination. [It] still is afraid of our nuclear potential.” As the ultimate national other, the U.S. seeks to “directly or indirectly...interfere in our internal political processes.” It does so, for instance, on economic and diplomatic levels. First it was the 1974 Jackson-Vanik amendment. When trade restrictions were lifted after Russia's accession to the WTO in August 2012, so that the U.S. was able to “enjoy the benefits of Russia’s obligations under the very WTO provisions,” the U.S. could “forget everything that happened during the Cold War and move on. But no! It had to drag in another anti-Russian law - the Magnitsky bill [in December 2012]....Why did [the Americans] do that? Just so that could blow their gills out: ‘we are the tough guy’.” Having recruited an army of Sovietologs, who do not understand what is going on in our country, [and who] do not understand the changing dynamics of the world,” the U.S. “dwells in the past.” Besides, the U.S also attempts to “become a part of the internal politics” of the country by sponsoring Russian politicians through NGOs active in Russia.

While Putin focuses his attention on the government of the U.S. as the main tragic national other, some European countries do not escape Putin's criticism either. As becomes apparent through a close reading of Putin's psycho-rhetorical narrative, European countries - present and aspiring member of NATO, including former Soviet Republics - cannot compete with the might of the U.S. and therefore choose to assume a position that is “strange, bordering on hypocrisy,” “rather destructive “ as it “[mocks]” the memory of the common anti-fascist fight.

---

336 “State of the Nation,” n. pag.
337 Dresen n. pag.; “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” n. pag.
339 “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” n. pag.
and “[breaks] a traditional bond” with Russia. Europe is depicted as a victim of the aggressive economic and political behavior of the U.S.: “As to the issue that Gazprom [the largest Russian and one of the largest gas companies in the world] sinks its teeth in Europe's flesh. I do not know why the Americans worry so much about Europe's flesh. Probably because they do not want to leave it alone, they like it, it is a good flesh.” The position of a victim, however, does not absolve the European tragic national other of its deliberate and premeditated deeds: “of economic agreements, glorification of fascist henchmen, and the desire to rewrite history.”

Even more responsibility lies with the U.S., which drags others into its “imperial [games] on the global arena.” The unilateral actions of the U.S., for example the military campaigns of the U.S. in Iraq and the violent events in Libya, undermine the legitimacy of international law, spreads chaos and instills fear in the weak, thus spurring an arms race: “Even the arms race speeds up because small countries do not feel safe today. International law does not defend [their] interests. So they are forced to seek [help] or ...to acquire new weapons.”

It is peculiar that the U.S., together with the strongest European countries, are portrayed as being guilty of destabilizing world peace both today and in the years before the Second World War: “before the war, those who determined the world's fate failed to notice the threat in time. As a result, millions had to pay for this political short-sightedness, for this inability to overcome personal ambitions.” Similarly today, cynical national others - the U.S. and its allies - “smooth the way for new tragedies.”

Moreover, as Putin keeps repeating, the U.S. acts stealthily under a democratic disguise:
[T]here is a lot of civilians' blood on the [U.S.] hands. [It] probably likes it, cannot live without those awful, repulsive images of Gaddafi's execution, when the whole world was shown how he was murdered, covered in blood. Is this democracy? Who did it? Drones, including American ones, attacked Gaddafi's convoy. Then, having sent a radio signal to a special task force which was not supposed to be there on [Libya's] territory, brought in the so called opposition and the militants killed [Gaddafi] without trial.\textsuperscript{347}

References to the hypocrisy of the U.S. in Putin's psycho-rhetorical narrative are numerous:

“Abu Ghraib prison and Guantanamo Bay detention camp, where people are held without being charged with anything,” the lack of transparency in the electoral process and impunity of those who “commit crimes against adopted Russian children.”\textsuperscript{348} Moreover, the U.S. has the nerve to undeservingly accuse Russia of anti-democratic infringements. The tragic national other, according to Putin, does not only attempt to hurt Russia, fearful of the country's growing power, but furthermore ventures to shift the blame for pursued instability and anti-democratic actions on to Russia's shoulders. Putin stresses that “[Russia] has always been open and sincere” and its actions appropriate in each situation.\textsuperscript{349} “If they smacked us, we must return the favor, otherwise they will always be smacking us,” continues Putin. “Adequately or not - this is another question. Besides, they were not provoked. They are up to the ears in a specific [bodily] fluid...I have already mentioned their problems ...[which] they blame us for. This is wrong.”\textsuperscript{350}

While purposefully accusing Russia of anti-democratic politics, the U.S., according to Putin, does not practice what it preaches: its actions and words are full of double standards. The

\textsuperscript{347} “Conversation with Vladimir Putin. Continuation,” 2011, n. pag.
\textsuperscript{348} “Vladimir Putin's Annual Press Conference,” 2012 n. pag.
\textsuperscript{349} “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” n. pag.
\textsuperscript{350} “Vladimir Putin's Annual Press Conference,” 2012 n. pag.
U.S., as Putin argues, has not learned from history: “Like fascism, terrorism brings violence, death, disregard for human dignity. And 'double standards' in relation to terrorists are unacceptable, so are the attempts to exonerate fascist supporters. And that is why we must counter these challenges.”

By focusing on the image of Russia which has unduly become the main target of American cynicism, Putin promotes the tragically marked elegy of the national self. Having situated the national self within the tragic elegy, Putin anticipates the heroic duty of Russia: “Our nation won in the most terrible war of the twentieth century, and in general the most terrible war in the human history, and in so doing saved our country, saved Europe from fascism and gave us the future.”

Parallel to Nashi's epic depiction of the national self, Putin draws parallels between the heroic deeds of the Soviet Union and the present mission of Russia to prevent “chaos,” “defend itself” and save other countries “from disintegration and unending civil wars.”

Although Putin sees the danger of American cynicism, which purportedly breeds terrorism and promotes a fascist-like ideology of global domination, he does not fully commit to the tragedy of Russia's national others. Putin insists that Russia “[has] more friends than enemies” and sees the U.S. and Europe as its “trade and economic partner” and, moreover, an “ally” in the war on terror. To mitigate this grotesque conflict with the purported friends, Putin emphasizes that “[t]he atmosphere of mutual trust and a common goal to win during the historic handshake at the River Elbe is especially in demand today.”

Referring to the events of the Second World War, when in 1945 American and Soviet troops joined forces at the River Elbe,
thus bringing the war close to its end, it may seem that Putin insists that the common anti-fascist past determines the common anti-terrorist present. Such a conclusion, however, would be inaccurate as it involves only the level of imaginary fantasy-frames. By engaging the symbolic dimension of the analysis of Putin's psycho-rhetorical narrative, one may also see that the grotesque juxtaposition of friendship and conflict is the structural peculiarity of Putin's national subject.

The Russian national subject does not intend to get rid of its tragic national others because Russia needs them to be able to position the national self as what the Other - the dominant symbolic order of liberal democracy - has been always missing, that is, the objet a. Such is the structure of the Discourse of the Hysteric, which is also adopted by Nashi and Russian neo-fascists. This, however, is not the only feature that brings the psycho-rhetorical narratives of Putin, Nashi and Russian neo-fascists close. They all rely heavily on ethically questionable tragic fantasy-frames of epic, elegy, burlesque, as well as tragedy proper. Having discussed how Putin, in unison with Nashi, perceives the U.S., as the most sinister national other, to be in cahoots with European “fascists” and international terrorists in attempts to strip Russia of its sovereignty and thus national identity, I shall now discuss Putin’s responses to the presence of the genuine fascist threat and the authentic anti-fascist force in Russia.

The reaction of Putin's regime to the outburst of Russian neo-fascis in Russia is disquieting. Despite numerous protests by human rights activists and experts, Russian liberal politicians, analysts and journalists, openly neo-fascist and xenophobic organizations year after year are allowed to organize the Russian March, known as “the bright show of all Russian extreme ethnic nationalists.”356 The reaction of the Kremlin to these officially unsanctioned ethnic rallies is even more disturbing. Having failed to get the two-day Kondopoga riots under

356 Sumskoy, n. pag.
control promptly, the city authorities instead promised to consider the city residents' petition to resettle all Caucasians (primarily Chechens) from Kondopoga. According to the leader of Karelia, Sergey Katanandov, “the main reason for the public unrest [is] that before our eyes representatives of other nations acted disrespectfully and belligerently, ignoring the mentality of our nation” (Vasiliev). Similarly, the 2010 unsanctioned racial rally on Manezh Square in Moscow was not broken up by police as soon as it started. Despite the aggressive behavior of the rally participants toward non-Slavic passersby and police officers, the latter made almost no arrests to avoid “provoking more serious incidents” (sixty-five people who were detained were subsequently released, while as many as forty people were injured in the racist attacks).\(^{357}\)

Moreover, the captain of the Moscow Special Purpose Mobile Unit (OMON) and the chief of the Central Internal Affairs Directorate came to Manezh Square to persuade the protesters to disperse, having promised resolution of the murder case that largely triggered the rioting.\(^{358}\) To top it all off, the main Kremlin ideologist, former First Deputy of the Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov insisted that it was Russian liberal politicians who should be blamed for the Manezh Square chaos: liberal politicians “have been persistently setting the fashion for unsanctioned public actions, Nazis and cheapskates follow it.”\(^{359}\) Similarly, Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev accused Antifa - “the radical left youth” - of provoking the ethnic disturbances on Manezh Square.\(^{360}\) The government’s “half-hearted” efforts to deal with the violent racist mob are difficult to comprehend, especially compared to, as I will discuss in a

\(^{357}\) See “Russian Far-Right Groups Rally Around Sviridov,” n. pag.; “Participants of the Rally on Manezh Square Started Attacking Police,” n. pag.

\(^{358}\) See “The Rally Against ‘Ethnic Crime’ Began Near the Kremlin,” n. pag.

\(^{359}\) “Surkov Found ‘Liberal’ Traces in the Riots on Manezh Square,” n. pag.

\(^{360}\) “Manezh Square, Nurgaliyev Comments,” n. pag.
moment, prompt and violent police responses to peaceful public actions organized by political oppositional groups, including Antifa.\textsuperscript{361}

While Putin promised to “suppress any manifestations of extremism no matter where they come from” and acknowledged that “hooligans can be from both the Caucasus and from Moscow,” he insists that “there are no signs of...Russian extreme ethnic nationalism” in Russia.\textsuperscript{362} What prompted the riots in Kondopoga and Moscow, and what drove some to organize demonstrations like the Russian March is, apparently, love and worry for the Russian nation. According to Sergey Baburin, the leader of a nationalist political party who met with Putin to discuss the 2007 Russian March, the latter “took interest in our activity geared towards the strengthening of patriotism in Russia.”\textsuperscript{363} To quote Putin himself, “[the] well known events in Kondopoga, Sagra, on Manezh Square in Moscow are primarily the result of the inactivity of law enforcement agencies and the irresponsibility of state officials. Corruption [and the] inability [of state officials] to guarantee justice, to defend the interests of people, become breeding grounds for interethnic conflicts and tension.”\textsuperscript{364} Putin goes even further to claim that the actions of participants at neo-fascist rallies and instigators of racial riots are clear examples of democracy at work. Referring in particular to the ethnic riots on Manezh Square in response to the murder of soccer fan Sviridov, purportedly by people from the Caucasus, and the meeting he had with predominantly ethnic Russian soccer fans after the events, Putin says:”we must meet with these

\textsuperscript{363} Sumskoy, n. pag.
\textsuperscript{364} “Prime Minister Putin,” n. pag.
people, work with them....In general, they are positive people....Don't we see how [soccer fans] abroad smash shop widows and destroy stadiums?”365

The actions of Russian neo-fascists, for Putin, are well warranted: “The problem is that recently more and more people from the Caucasus have come to [Russian] cities. Many do not fit into the [Russian] culture....This often triggers legitimate anger.”366 It is clear that Putin refuses to see any signs of tragedy in the sincere hatred of participants in neo-fascists rallies and instigators at racist riots. For him, those instances of ethnic animosity are no more than a healthy democratic process when citizens are able to criticize their government. It is worth noting that this position of Putin is not an extension of a comic vision of his own limitations. As discussed in Chapter Three, in Russia the autocrat has always been considered a defender of the people's interests from the greed and corruption of the nobility (or the government).

While the Nashi movement is supported by President Putin, and neo-fascists are tolerated by the state, independent anti-fascists are often prosecuted and denied a chance to voice their discontent. Apparently, Antifa has become a common nuisance in Russia, both in the eyes of the Russian public and the state. For instance, many Russians see both neo-fascists and true anti-fascists as equally dangerous street hooligans who fisticuff with each other for “some obscure ideas,” and state officials blame the “radical” and truly anti-fascist youth for provoking ethnic disturbances.367 Antifa stands at an immense distance from its anti-fascist counterparts in Nashi and their neo-fascist opponents, both in how they are treated by the state, and, which is more important for the purposes of my argument, how they envision the national self and the national other.

Indeed, *Antifa* has good reasons to exercise caution in relation to law enforcement and state authorities. It has not been a rare occasion that the police refrained from protecting the audience at allegedly anti-fascist music events against neo-fascists, or that law enforcement officers refused to file hate crime charges against neo-fascists. The discriminatory treatment of the true anti-fascist groups by the state is also revealed when they seek permission for public gatherings. More often than not, true anti-fascists are denied opportunities to hold rallies, and when unsanctioned mass meetings do happen the police usually crack down on them promptly and severely.

The above examples of rising ethnic violence, the Kremlin's reluctance to curb racial aggression, coupled with the regime's suspicion of liberal democracy, may suggest that Putin feels more comfortable in the company of extreme nationalists than supporters of liberal freedoms (including members of *Antifa*). Indeed, for Putin, liberal opposition means radicals who “repeat the scenario of the 'Orange' revolution aiming at the disintegration of [Russia],” for which territorial integrity is translated into the idea of the complete national self. 368 As a part of Russian liberal opposition, independent anti-fascists then are seen as naive radicals trained and aided by those who sponsor terrorism all around the world and foment fascist sentiments in Europe. One may see that instead of relying on the term “fascism,” Putin resorts to the word “terrorism” to picture Russia's national enemies. The resolutely tragic image of a cold-blooded mastermind is far more powerful than the burlesque image of a deranged neo-fascist (or religious) fanatic, as it provides Putin with the means to symbolically sacrifice the most tragically perceived enemies of Russia at once: the U.S. and all those who it purportedly encourages, including international terrorists, Chechen militants, Western European countries and former Soviet republics that are suspicious of or outright alarmed by the Kremlin’s agenda,

and, finally, Russian liberal opposition and *Antifa*. The image of the cynical terrorist and fascist sympathizer, personified by the U.S., also allows Putin to position Russia at the center, that is, as the *objet a*, or the vital element, of the dominant order of Western liberal democracy.
6 CONCLUSION

As soon as the results of the U.S. 2016 presidential elections were released, many in Russia – from ordinary Russians to lawmakers of the State Duma, the Kremlin-sponsored mass media and Putin – rejoiced at Donald Trump’s surprising victory. “Yes, we did,” some asserted, making a pun of Barack Obama’s famous campaign slogan.1 “America is ours!” exclaimed others, noting that “just like Crimea, [the U.S.] was taken without bloodshed! What an effective foreign policy!”2 There were also those, who in a flurry of excitement, like Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the Kremlin-run RT news channel, “want[ed] to ride around Moscow with an American flag...[because Americans] deserved it today,” adding that “[i]f Trump recognizes Crimea as a part of Russia, lifts sanctions, agrees with us on Syria, and sets [Julian] Assange free, I am going to retire. For the world then will be splendid.”3 Sergei Glazyev, a Kremlin economic adviser, was eager to entertain a conjecture that “Trump, as a pragmatic person, will scrap anti-Russian sanctions that are also hurting American business.”4

While it is not apparent what the future holds for the Russia-U.S. relationship, it is, however, clear that the Kremlin has discerned in Trump a kindred spirit – a politician who talks the business-like language of rational negotiations, pragmatic deals, harmony of selfish interests, and strategic partnership, brushing aside ethical considerations, which amounts to a fairly tragic attitude. In fact, Trump’s campaign messages overall have been largely in sync not only with the national fantasies of Putin and pro-Putin “anti-fascists” (the difference between which is only a matter of intensity, rather than substance), but also the national narrative of Russian neo-fascists.

---

1 Filipov and Roth n.pag.
2 Loyko n.pag.
4 Bennettts n.pag.
Trump’s promises to “rebuild” and “restore” what was supposedly “ripped from” the U.S., to stop the “American carnage,” and putting the interests of Americans first resembles the Russian neo-fascists’ passionate embrace of apocalyptic elegy in pursuit of tragically glorious epic. Trump’s nationally divisive calls for patriotism and public deliberation that is supposed to compel solidarity are reminiscent of the traditional Russian concept of sobornost. The latter emphasizes collective interests at the expense of individual rights and freedoms and is key to Putin’s and Nashi’s tragic appeals to the unity of the nations in the face of threats from abroad and Russia’s own “national traitors.”

The present work, however, is limited to the analysis of the national fantasies of several national subjects in contemporary Russia: Russian neo-fascists, pro-Kremlin “anti-fascists,” independent anti-fascists, and Putin. A common thread that runs through all four national fantasies is the topic of fascism and anti-fascist fight. Admittedly, the memory of Russia’s battle with Nazi Germany as one of the most traumatic in Russia’s modern history had a profound, although not necessarily awaited impact on the way Russians negotiate their national identity. Despite the generally comic idea of anti-fascist resistance, most Russians – those who approve of Putin’s regime – subscribe to a fairly tragic idea of Russianness: the rhetoric of the state, represented by Putin and the Kremlin-backed Nashi (who has been merely louder and less restrained in expressing the views of the former), gravitates toward the hateful message, or tragic mourning, of Russian neo-fascists, rather than Antifa’s comic melancholy. The question that arises then concerns the way of how Putin and Nashi, as well as the other national subjects, account for Russia’s anti-fascist legacy and maneuver contemporary comic conversations that make up the hegemonic field of Western liberal democracy. To answer this question I resort to a

---

5 “Inaugural Address” n.pag.
6 Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation” n.pag.
Lacanian-Burkean reading of the national narratives in question both on the most immediate, or Imaginary, and structural, or Symbolic, levels.

As the analysis of the Imaginary dimension demonstrates, Putin and Nashi portray Russia’s fight with fascism in an unequivocally comic light - as the utmost aspiration for freedom. Yet, the freedom of ethnic Russians from Nazi Germany did not necessarily imply the freedom of other nations from Soviet Russia. The Red Army’s resistance to and liberation of other countries from fascism created an opportunity for Stalin to secure its totalitarian grip over Central and Eastern Europe, which he took without scruple or diffidence. As such, the experience and the legacy of the Soviet Union’s confrontation with Nazism fits the largely tragic history of the Russian national subject, manifested in such beliefs and practices as xenophobia, military chauvinism, racism, anti-Semitism, Russian Orthodoxy and a proclivity for a strong government, which have been traditionally characteristic of the Russian national idea. At present both Russian neo-fascists and the state-sponsored “anti-fascists” invoke the memory of the Great Patriotic War primarily tragically - as a means to mobilize Russians against the supposed enemies of ethnic Russians and the Russian state respectively. Nevertheless, Russia’s fascist and increasingly authoritarian national subjects appeal to the memory of “[t]he Great Victory [which] has been and will always be the ultimate yardstick to evaluate our motives and actions,” in order to signify “the power and moral authority of modern Russia”? In other words, both Russian neo-fascists and the Kremlin, together with “the Kremlin youth,” see the history of the country’s fight with fascism as the ultimate evidence of modern Russia’s strength and leadership, which are viewed as a guarantee of Russia’s sovereignty and thus the idea of the complete national self. To maintain this proposition as a supposedly shared premise in the dialogue with the West, however, proves to be challenging.

7 “Gala Reception” n.pag.; “Meeting of the Russian Organizing Committee ‘Victory’” n.pag.
The incompatibility of between the legacy of the Second World War and the memory of the Great Patriotic War, which ignores the moral implications of the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was especially notable during Russia’s May 9 celebrations to mark the 70th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany, which the leaders of major Western countries, including the U.S., UK, France, and Germany, refused to attend. In the eyes of the West, the Victory Day parade on the Red Square in Moscow could have not been considered in isolation from Russia’s annexation of Crimea and military involvement in Eastern Ukraine to supposedly protect the country’s Russian speaking population against the “fascist” pro-European interim government. In this regard, Hillary Clinton, for example, compared Putin to Hitler: “‘All...the ethnic Germans…who were in places like Czechoslovakia and Romania and other places, Hitler kept saying they’re not being treated right. I must go and protect my people, and that’s what’s gotten everybody so nervous.’”

Western leaders could not fathom the idea of attending the celebratory display of Russia’s military might, because, as Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, believes, the “presence...beside the current aggressors and the person who uses weapons against civilians in Eastern Ukraine...[is] too ambiguous.”

Russian officials, in their turn, explained that some Western leaders “refused [to join the Victory Day parade] for ideological reasons, trying to use this sacred day in their policy aimed at containing and isolating Russia; some followed suit, while others were scared.” Instead of honoring “the Soviet people who brought freedom to others,” the West purportedly indulges fascists in Ukraine, as well as the Baltics, thus displaying its double standards. Considering this escalating division between Russia and the West, it is not immediately clear how the former is...

---

8 Rucker n.pag.
9 Parfitt, “Leaders’ Snub” n.pag. See also Higgins, “Putin Swipes”; Wesolowsky.
10 “Some World Leaders” n.pag.
11 “Military Parade on Red Square” n.pag.
able to sustain a tragic image of the nation that is not only satisfying for the Russians themselves, but can also be desirable by Russia’s ultimate national other, that is, the predominantly comic West. To figure out the technique of such rhetorical jujutsu, I have scrutinized the Symbolic dimension of the psycho-rhetorical narratives in question to identify strategic positions from which national fantasies are performed. As the analysis reveals, both Russian neo-fascists and pro-Putin’s youth group, following its sponsor, assume the role of the agent of the Hysteric’s Discourse, who rebels against the West, viewed as an impotent, lacking Master. The hysteric instead considers itself as the bearer of the truth, or mastery, as the one who is supposedly in possession of the objet a – the mysterious object-guarantee of identity fullness.

Despite the Kremlin’s attempts to modernize Russia’s economy, technology and diplomacy to present an inviting face, Russia’s image in the West is not as desirable as the Kremlin hopes it to be. According to the Freedom House and Transparency International rankings, Russia’s political regime steadily fails to qualify as an electoral democracy (the country was ranked as “not free” in political rights and civil liberties), and Russia’s economy is consistently evaluated as one of the most corrupt in the world. In a public service announcement by Amnesty International, for example, social and political coercion prevalent in contemporary Russia is metaphorically portrayed in a story of a craftsman assembling dead, bloody, crying matreshkas into one. The last doll to nest all the other dolls, pictured in handcuffs or with duct tape over their mouths, is smiling and beautiful. While building Russia a charming image or popular brand, the Kremlin continues to blatantly disregard liberal values both domestically and internationally. This inconsistency between Russia’s words and actions can be explained not so much by the Kremlin’s hypocrisy, but rather by the desire of the

---

12 See “Russia”; “Russia Ranks Low.”
13 See “Beware.”
Kremlin, as well as other national subjects, to give the Western project of liberal democracy a distinctly Russian meaning. To be able to do so, the Kremlin attempts to discredit the hegemonic narrative of Western liberal democracy and thus to recover the legacy of anti-fascism. All needed is to deprive the project of Western liberal democracy of its ethical considerations.

Mindful of the pervasiveness of globalization processes and, moreover, hoping Russia becomes a rightful, or privileged, member of international organizations and, more specifically, the West-led economic community, which would arguably accelerate economic and technological modernization of the country, the Kremlin, as well as Nashi, adopts the language of the West. The latter is the language of freedom, rationality, law, and other concepts that, at least in theory, are comically inspired. Transposed from the level of the individual to the plane of the collective, national subject, the idea of an unrestricted freedom of rational pursuit of sovereign interests of Russia animates national fantasies of Putin and the Kremlin-backed “anti-fascists,” who also make repeated references to the rationality of the state and the logic of law, which governs relations within the state and internationally.

Such characterization of the Kremlin’s motivation, however, does not allow calling Putin a classic proponent of neoliberal institutionalism – a view in the field of international relations that sees international institutions as a condition of cooperation and an expression of mutually beneficial arrangements. Yet, being aware of the implications that the unstoppable force of globalization has for the domestic and foreign policies of any state, Putin is not a typical political realist either: unlike Russian neo-fascists, he does not hold solely to the idea that under the conditions of global chaos states tend to pursue such interests as power and security aggressively, often by resorting to military means.
Instead, the Kremlin aspires to maximize Russian national interests and actualize the country’s potential through a combination of hard and soft power, which arguably demonstrate Russia’s strength and authority respectively. The latter – as the object a – in their turn are regarded as a guarantee of Russia’s independence and ideational certainty. Hard power is understood as economic and military coercion employed in, for example, the Russia-Ukraine gas crises, the 2008 Russian-Georgian armed conflict over Georgia’s break-away South Ossetia and, finally, Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea and military involvement in the war in Eastern Ukraine. Feeling no qualms about relying on the country’s military might, natural resources, as well as the purportedly advantageous geographic location to its own benefit, the Kremlin denounces economic sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries as “absolutely unlawful,” arguing that “these sanctions…certainly worsen our international relations.”

Despite the fact that Russia’s actions remain largely fiscally or physically violent, the Kremlin hopes to reassure the West that the country’s foreign policy has become more “dynamic, constructive, pragmatic and flexible” and reliant on its soft power - the appeal of the Russian culture, political values and way of life. Since the early years of Putin’s first presidency, the Kremlin has been indeed actively building a brand of a new Russia and its people – “attractive” and “influential.” Putin insists that the countries that lag behind in the global redistribution of power will be left with nothing but a subordinate role in world politics. To avoid such a dismal fate for Russia and its people, Putin asserts, “[the country] must not only preserve its geopolitical relevance - [the country] must expand it, [Russia] must be in demand....”

---

14 On the Russia-Ukraine gas crises, see Bigg; “Factbox”; “Gloves”; Hulbert; Jolly; “Ukraine”; Waal. On the Russian-Georgia armed conflict, see “Countdown”; Ertel et. al.; Levy; “War.”
16 Putin, “Meeting” n.pag.
17 “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly” 2012, n.pag.
18 “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” 2012, n.pag.
win this global “popularity contest,” the Kremlin has pledged to largely abandon the foreign policy tactics of military or economic pressure, or hard power. Instead, Putin advocates “promoting [Russia’s] interests and opinions through persuasion and by winning over” the country’s strategic partners, in other words, by building the Russian brand.  

Nation branding as a primary tactic of a “soft power” approach, thus, has purportedly become one of the major goals of Putin’s administration. As Lacan tells us, it takes the mere presence of the national Other, or the one who can be addressed the question “Che vuoi?”, to get to know the national self. The Kremlin, however, literally relies on foreign expertise in order to build a positive image of Russia. Adore Creative, Ketchum Inc., and Weber Shandwick - all U.S.-based creative and public relations agencies - are among several Western firms hired by the Russian government to help it “tell its story of economic growth and opportunity for its citizens.” Such “blending of ‘Mad Men’ and Kremlin apparatchiks” has proved to be effective now and then. Russia, for instance, won its bids to host the 2014 Olympic Games, the 2014 Formula One Grand Prix, and the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The Kremlin has also been successful at launching English-speaking mass media outlets: TV channel Russia Today, the Sputnik news agency, an online and print newspaper Russia Beyond the Headlines (which publishes monthly supplements in such international newspapers as The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Daily Telegraph, etc.), and an online information portal Russiaprofile.org. Other state-

---

19 “Meeting with Russian Ambassadors” n.pag. On the concepts of “hard power” and “soft power,” see Nye.  
20 To be precise, the task of building a positive image of Russia came to the forefront of the Kremlin’s agenda during Dmitry Medvedev’s Presidency (2008-2012). Since many have questioned Medvedev’s ability to execute his Presidential duties independently from Putin, it would be correct to refer to Medvedev’s presidency as the Medvedev-Putin tandem (see, for example, Gvosdev). 
21 This knowledge is not the comically moved truth about oneself. 
22 Finn n.pag. 
23 Kramer, “Selling” n.pag.
sponsored national branding projects include the Skolkovo Innovation Center (a Russian Silicon Valley), the darling project of Dmitry Medvedev, and Putin’s Agency for Strategic Initiatives.\(^{24}\)

In addition to the aforesaid efforts, the Kremlin’s biggest attempt at building and promoting the Russian brand was the “democratic anti-fascist” youth group *Nashi*. Created as an ideological antidote to the so-called ‘orange’ threat, *Nashi* pushed for an idea of the purportedly effective civil society. Unlike the common understanding of civil society, according to which the latter stands apart from and oftentimes against the government, *Nashi*’s version is anti-establishment only as long as the power it counters is that of the government of a supposedly unfriendly state. Moreover, *Nashi*, as the self-proclaimed Russian civil society, is purportedly comprised of a new generation of creative government officials and young bureaucrats who “[are] supposed to start a revolution in the way one thinks and runs the country.”\(^{25}\) What *Nashi* ventures then is to centralize power in the hands of the state and wipe out dissent, since *Nashi* as “the bureaucracy is the state which has really made itself into civil society.”\(^{26}\)

For years, the Kremlin has been pointing out the supposed hypocrisy or even cynicism of the West and “the degradation (in a political sense of the world) of the idea of democracy in Western society.”\(^{27}\) Claiming that American democracy has come to naught, the state has been steadily leaving Russians bereaved of hope that a democratic regime that promotes individual freedom, liberties and, generally speaking, a dignified life, is viable and thus worth aspiring for. The 2016 U.S. presidential elections presented Putin with another sterling opportunity to move one step closer to his goal. Before the elections, Putin, directly or via his mouthpiece *Nashi* and

\(^{24}\) The Skolkovo Innovation Center is an ambitious high technology project, aimed at stimulating an image of Russia as a cutting-edge intellectual and entrepreneurial environment. See the Skolkovo’s official website at <http://www.sk.ru/en>. Also see Goverdovskaya; Morris; Shatalova. The Agency for Strategic Initiatives was designed to support young entrepreneurs, develop creativity, and deal with social issues. See the Agency’s official website at <http://www.asi.ru>.

\(^{25}\) “Manifesto” n.pag.

\(^{26}\) Marx 46.

\(^{27}\) “Answers to Journalists’ Questions” n.pag.
state-run mass media, pointed to the purportedly undemocratic nature of the U.S. Electoral College system, spoke of his bewilderment as Russia’s requests to observe the U.S. elections were denied, hinting at possible electoral fraud, and expressed reservations whether ordinary Americans bear sway over the U.S. politics. After Trump had sealed his victory with the Electoral College, but had got outdistanced in the popular vote, Putin started to whistle a different tune.\textsuperscript{28} Now, he stood by the “legitimate U.S. President,” disconcerted by the attempts of the liberal mainstream political elite to “stage a \textit{Maidan} in Washington to prevent Trump from taking office” and “to bind hand and foot the newly elected President to prevent him from fulfilling his election promises.”\textsuperscript{29} The reason of this about-face is purely strategic: whether claiming that the American regime does not represent the majority of Americans or insisting that “true” democracy does not have to be inspired by liberal values does not make much difference to the Kremlin. Its objective as the agent of the Hysteric’s Discourse is to dismiss the Western liberal project by any means necessary and then to propose Russian “democracy” as an alluring alternative. Together with the alleged Russia’s military, economic and technological potential, Russian “true” democracy amounts to the desirable \textit{objet a}. With only a few minor differences, such as Russian neo-fascists’ vocal resistance to globalization, opposition to the Kremlin, a strong emphasis on both a biological and spiritual qualities of ethnic Russians, the national fantasy of neo-fascists matches that of the state-sponsored “anti-fascists” and Putin.

The Discourse of the Hysteric is characteristic of the narrative of the Russian neo-fascist subject, who in an analogously tragic manner negotiates Russian national identity as an uncontestable confluence of superior genetic material and spirit, while at the same time emphasizing the supposed pragmatism and thoughtfulness of their national sentiments. Although

\textsuperscript{28} See Berman, Mark; Filipov; “Joint News Conference.”
\textsuperscript{29} “Joint News Conference” n.pag.
the Russian idea in its most tragic form has been traditionally rooted in the anti-Enlightenment suspicion of rationality, and fascism is often explained as an eruption of the unconscious or a corruption of rationality. I argue that (ir)rationality cannot be regarded as a definitive feature of a fascists narrative. What unites various theories of fascism, including Jung’s view on fascism as mass psychosis, Žižek’s and MacCannell’s idea of the perverse fascist subject, Benjamin’s aestheticization of politics, Adorno’s understanding of fascism as an excess of rationality, Kristeva’s theory of fascism as abjection, Bauman’s bureaucratic fascism, Arendt’s banal fascism, Gentile’s sacralization of politics, and Burke’s explication of fascism as a quasi-religious movement toward perfection, is the tragic nature of the fascist national fantasy, rather than the (ir)rationality or pathological nature of fascism. While the comic national subject builds its identity around lack, making it a pronounced core of any desired object, the tragic national subject sustains itself only negatively, that is, by positioning itself against the national other and only then being able to get to know what it desires. In this sense, tragic identity is as hollow as the discourse of liberal democracy is in the view of the Russian tragic national others discussed in this work.

For Russian neo-fascists, Putin and Nashi, Western liberal democracy is an inherently weak and misguided project: it purportedly undermines the ability of nations to resist their enemies, while promoting all-permissiveness and shameless consumerism. So defined, it arguably cannot help but to deteriorate into oligarchic and totalitarian forms of capitalism and outright fascism, when the strongest lead and others fall victims to the former. Save for independent anti-fascists, all national subjects analyzed in this work deny Western liberal democracy any political viability: as an appeal to universal rights and freedoms, tolerance and multiculturalism, it supposedly lacks a vigorous partisan, ideological commitment and as such is
nothing but an empty form or a structure that can be better served if equipped with Russian, authentically “democratic” values. In other words, the discussed tragic national subjects seek to challenge the discourse of liberal democracy – the comic narrative of universally applicable human rights and freedoms, by passing it off for a cynical discourse of global bureaucracy. Yet it is such tragic rhetoric of an ethically detached administrative-like operation, managerial efforts with regard to non-ethnic Russians, as well as to civic participation and political action in general, is inherently cynically. Having gutted the dominant discourse of liberal democracy out of its life, its comic essence, Russian neo-fascists, as well as the Kremlin and the youth group it sponsors, then are able to comfortably negotiate their distinctly tragic national fantasies.

In the course of the bureaucratization of the political, the impact of the notion of sobornost is perhaps the most profound and far-reaching. The idiosyncratic idea of truth and individual freedom discovered in harmony with the collective molds the national fantasies of the tragic national subjects in question. Yet, in line with prevalent sentiments surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union and recent poll data, the vast majority of Russians did not and do not identify with Soviet and Russian authorities. Between the period 1998 and 2016, in response to the pollsters’ request to identify the most appropriate statements about the government, 45 to 60 percent of the polled replied that “people who we vote into office quickly forget our concerns and disregard the interests of the common folk,” followed by 25 to 29 percent of Russians who consider “authorities [to be] a special group of people, the elite who think only about themselves and do not care about us.” Surprisingly, during the same period the number of Russians who think that power must not be usurped by one person reduced by half – falling from 44 to 21 percent. Among Russians who now believe in the Kremlin’s strong hand are 35 percent of

30 “State and Society” n.pag.
31 See “State and Society.”
those who support the strong leader unconditionally and 37 percent of those who think that concentration of power in Putin’s hands is acceptable only as a temporary solution (compared to 16 percent in 1989).

What the polls and the present analysis suggest is that most Russians do not have a supposedly innate preference for authoritarian practices and continue to hope that Russia one day becomes not only an economically and technologically advanced country, but also an open, fair and free society. This, however, does not mean that most Russians actively hold to a resolutely comic idea of the national self and the national other. To reconcile these conflicting claims I argue that the discourse spoken by the Russian national subject is the discourse of the obsessive. The obsessive is both a zealot and a cynic, who may not believe that the Master is all-powerful, but still bend down before its mastery in hopes to tell its own truth, to become its own Master one day.

The ascendance of new master signifiers, however, does not have to lead to a tragic resolution; instead the structure of the obsessive as it is grounded in the notion of sobornost may possibly create an opportunity for dissent or any other authentic, comic actions. As profoundly ambiguous and even contradictory, sobornost was conceptualized not only as an antithesis to Westernization and the proliferation of bourgeois, material values, but also in opposition to language uniformity and, more generally speaking, the “ecclesial authoritarianism” of Roman Catholicism.\textsuperscript{32} Understood as “a living world that must be enfleshed and lived rather than encoded and domesticated,” sobornost then, I believe, possesses a liberatory potential. A further inquiry is required to understand whether sobornost, which is foundational of the entire Russian idea, can be reformulated as, in Lacan’s terms, the acephalous knowledge, or masterless truth, of

\textsuperscript{32} Moyse, Kirkland, and McDowell xxxii.
the unconscious, which may possibly animate a comic vision of Russian civil society in particular and the Russian national subject in general.  

While tragic attitudes continue to dominate the province of national identity construction in contemporary Russia, Antifa offers a comforting alternative. By occupying a position of the Analyst, it offers a critical history of both the Russian national subject and neoliberal hegemony. Originally galvanized by passion for individual freedom and human dignity, neoliberal practices have withdrawn from the comic ideals that the theory of neoliberalism is founded on, moving in the direction of “free market fundamentalism.” When it is thus corrupted, as it was, for example, the case during the democratic reforms of the 1990s, neoliberalism, in its entirety or partially, becomes a common language of various tragic forces, including, ironically, those that represent the state (Nashi, Putin) or those that counter globalization (Russian neo-fascists). While free market is considered to be antithetical to the state, and neoliberalization paves the way to global integration, the national fantasies of Nashi, Putin and Russian neo-fascists operate comfortably within a larger narrative of calculated aspirations toward the accumulation of capital and power. As David Harvey points out, the “uneven….development of neoliberalism, its frequently partial and lop-sided application from one state and social formation to another, testifies to the tentativeness of neoliberal solutions and the complex ways in which political forces, historical traditions, and existing institutional arrangements all shaped why and how the process of neoliberalization actually occurred.” From this angle, it is then not overly surprising that by speaking the language of neoliberalism (which is considered to be originally associated with political liberalism), some in Russia promote the system of crony capitalism and support

---

33 Moyse, Kirkland, and McDowell xxxi.
34 Harvey 7.
35 Harvey 13.
economic elites close to the state, and others envisage a scenario where ethnic Russians could lay claims to their supposedly rightful economic and political privileges.
WORKS CITED


“Agreement to Create the United Political Organization of Russian Nationalists.” Move
Akunov, Wolfgang. “On Succession of Byzantine Heritage.” The Information Portal of the
Aladin, Aleksandr. “China Controls Russian Mass Media.” The Information Portal of the
“Alcho-Terrorism against Russians.” The Information Portal of the Russian Imperial Movement.
“Alekssey Gaskarov and Maksim Solopov’s Interview with Russian Mass Media.” Antifa.ru.
of the Department of History, University of New Brunswick.
Allensworth, Wayne. The Russian Question: Nationalism, Modernization, and Post-Communist
“All to the Russian March.” The Information Portal of the Russian Imperial Movement. Russian
catalog/1363.html> (in Russian).
Ambrosio, Thomas. Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the
position/14526> (in Russian).
Will Help to Organize a Meeting between the Pope and Patriarch.” Kommersant.
“Andrey Loshak’s Interview with the 19 January Committee.” Antifa.ru. Antifa, 10 Jan. 2010.


ProQuest.


“Vladimir Putin's Answers to Questions at the Meeting with His Authorized Representatives.” 


